

# Environmentalists battle to get Peco to increase its use of green energy, but the oil industry calls it a job killer

May 10 2024, by Lynette Hazelton, The Philadelphia Inquirer

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The nation is in the middle of a contentious transformation from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

It's a change either hailed by environmentalists for addressing climate change and [public health](#) or loathed by the oil and gas industry for killing jobs and being less reliable, efficient and affordable. And what the increase in renewables will mean for consumers' pocketbooks is still unclear.

The latest battle played out before the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission, which every four years has to approve Peco's energy procurement, or default service plan, where the utility explains how it intends to buy electricity.

Peco's current DSP is set to expire next May.

## **PUC hearings**

In February, Peco filed its 1,235-page purchase plan with the regulators, essentially promising to do what it has been doing: obtaining the least expensive electric supply and purchasing 8% of its power from renewable sources, including 0.5% of [solar energy](#) generated within the state.

"Peco is proposing no change to its procurement process used in its prior default service program," according to the company's filing. It's a move that the company said guards against price volatility.

The PUC held two days of hearings on Peco's DSP at the end of April. About 80 people testified, including members of the Energy Justice Advocates (EJA), a group that includes POWER Interfaith, Vote Solar, Clean Air Council, Sierra Club, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and PennEnvironment.

"In my opinion, these criteria are insufficient and outdated. No less important but missing in PECO's list of criteria are the safety and health

of Pennsylvanians, as well as the urgent need to address our climate crisis," testified Howard Sherman, a Peco customer from Lansdowne.

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"For every hundred dollars that Peco spends on energy, it plans to spend 50 cents on solar," Wendy Greenspan, a co-convenor of POWER Interfaith's People's Energy Plan Campaign Group, said when she testified at the hearing.

"That's what Peco did in its last DSP four years ago. That's what it plans to do in this DSP for the next four years."

## **Dueling points of view**

According to the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission Climate Action Plan, the energy used in [residential buildings](#) in the Philadelphia area for everyday uses—heating, cooling, cooking, and electricity—accounts for about 19% of greenhouse gas emissions. The plan warned that "significant action is needed in the residential building sector to implement energy efficiency, electrification, and clean energy measures."

The EJA contends that it wants Peco to play more of a leadership role in encouraging renewables, starting with the energy supply mix Peco plans to purchase, which is generated almost entirely by burning fossil fuel.

"Why isn't Peco transitioning to more renewable energy?" Greenspan asked. "Many utilities across the country are. Why is Peco digging in its heels and resisting the use of renewable energy?"

In response, a Peco spokesperson said, "Our filing is designed to comply

with Pennsylvania law and regulations, which require us to procure electricity at the least cost over time, through a prudent mix of energy purchases to ensure adequate and reliable service, as well as price stability. These rules and regulations are designed to protect customers, including our low- and moderate-income customers, from paying above-market prices for their energy use."

"If this decision puts Pennsylvania energy jobs at risk, we will push the Biden Administration to reverse this decision."

Oil and gas industry experts counter that the state is retiring fossil fuel generation too quickly, before the capacity to replace it is available, forcing job losses and threatening grid resilience and reliability as demand for electricity is rising.

When the Biden administration temporarily paused new approvals of liquefied natural gas exports, both of the state's Democratic U.S. senators, Bob Casey and John Fetterman, issued a joint statement: "If this decision puts Pennsylvania energy jobs at risk, we will push the Biden administration to reverse this decision."

## **Solar rising**

Pennsylvania, a fossil fuel powerhouse, trails other states in terms of new [renewable energy](#). Over the last decade, no state's has grown more slowly, according to PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center's report "Renewables on the Rise 2023."

"Pennsylvania ranks a lowly 50th in the nation for percent growth in total solar, wind and geothermal generation since 2013," stated the report. It further explained, "In the last decade, Pennsylvania has tripled solar production—most of this growth coming since 2019. Yet in contrast, the U.S. saw a 12-fold growth in solar power and the leading state, Texas,

built out a whopping 90 times as much renewable power as Pennsylvania."

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## **Renewables on the rise 2023**

However, the move to solar is growing, especially amid large users.

The city, which owns about 600 buildings, recently announced a contract to buy solar-generated electricity from Energix Renewables, which will supply about a quarter of its need.

Swarthmore and Haverford Colleges and the University of Pennsylvania also announced that they will be purchasing all the electricity produced from solar facilities.

"Peco has presented the commission and its customers with its preference for four more years of wasted opportunities," testified Karl R. Rábago of Colorabo-based Rábago Energy LLC. Rábago accused Peco of short-sightedness and looking at lowest price generation over addressing the long-term impact of [climate change](#).

POWER Interfaith continues to sponsor public events, such as a trivia contest, outside City Hall on Wednesday, April 8, to educate the public while awaiting the PUC's final decision on Peco's plan by October.

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Citation: Environmentalists battle to get Peco to increase its use of green energy, but the oil industry calls it a job killer (2024, May 10) retrieved 16 August 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2024-05-environmentalists-peco-green-energy-oil.html>

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