

Windmills keep spinning clean power but electric utilities aren't interested

By KAZUNORI MORI

HAMATONBETSU, Hokkaido (Kyodo) Although the government is promoting wind power, electric utilities have been disinclined to buy into it and a law that sets an obligatory natural energy target is having little effect.

The government has fixed the wind power generation target at 3 million kilowatts for 2010, but industry sources said the goal will not be reached.



A wind farm churns out power in Tomamae, Hokkaido. TOMAMAE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT/KYODO PHOTO

The Belgium-based Global Wind Power Energy Council said Japan's wind power output topped 1 million kw at the end of fiscal 2005 to reach 1.08 million kw, making the nation No. 10 in global rankings.

There are more than 1,000 windmills spinning chiefly in coastal areas in Hokkaido, Kyushu and the Tohoku region. Local utilities, however, have stopped buying wind energy.

Although millions of yen are required to install a windmill, they have been cropping up in greater numbers. The reasons for the increase are that power output has been enhanced as technology improves, and wind is an energy source that emits no carbon dioxide.

A forerunner in the nation's wind power field is the nonprofit organization Hokkaido Green Fund of Sapporo, which built the windmill Hamakaze (beach wind) with an output capacity of about 1,000 kw in the town of Hamatonbetsu, Hokkaido, in 2001.

To promote natural energy, the government debuted the Renewable Portfolio Standards in 2003 to oblige utilities to achieve a fixed target of natural energy generation.

But the law has not been effective because utilities are reluctant to

buy wind power.

"Output is unstable because it depends on wind, preventing stable power supplies," a utility executive said.

The obligatory target of natural energy generation as a whole has been fixed at just 1.35 percent of total electric supply, so it is possible for power companies to achieve that goal with other natural energy, including using biomass converted from garbage.

As of fiscal 2005, the Hokkaido and Tohoku utilities had stopped buying wind power.

"We actually wanted to expand the business in Hokkaido, which is suited to wind power generation, but we have had to do the business in other areas," said Green Fund Secretary General Toru Suzuki.

Up to fiscal 2004, domestic wind power output had increased more than 30 percent a year, but fiscal 2005 saw only a 15 percent rise.

"Windmills are largely contributing to increases in tax revenues and tourists," said Kazuhiko Takada, deputy secretary general of the National Council of Wind Power Generation in Cities, Towns and Villages, based in Hokkaido's Tomamae, where there are 42 windmills.

"We want large increases in the volume electric power firms must buy to promote more wind power output."

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