

Alternative Energy - What's Old Is New Again

There's a lot more news about alternative energies recently. Different people have different ideas about just what it is. They also have different ideas about how long alternative energy has been around. I wrote this article to give my perspective on

One way to approach a definition of alternative energy is to consider what "regular" energy is. Ever since the mid 19th century, fossil fuels such as coal and oil have provided an increasing proportion of our energy needs. Fossil fuels have become the energy standard against which other forms of energy are considered alternative.

This wasn't always the case. In the not too distant past, sailing ships and animals powered transportation.

Dutch windmills are an icon of the country. Windmills are also closely associated with old ranches of the American West.

Many people are surprised to learn that producing solar hot water heating systems was a commercially profitable business in the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century.

Remembering these facts helps us keep things in perspective. The use of fossil fuels is more of a brief detour in energy history rather than a dominant stream. As fossil fuels become more expensive and environmental consequences become clear we actually are returning to other sources.

So for now we'll consider alternative energy to be any source of energy that doesn't rely on fossil fuels to create it.

We should make a distinction between alternative energy and renewable energy. People tend to assume that they're one and the same but they aren't. Some non-fossil fuel energy sources can be depleted.

Most sources of alternative energy have less environmental impact and burning fossil fuel. And most are renewable, meaning we don't have to worry about running out of them. These considerations have led to the increased interest in exploring alternative energy today

Although most people think about solar panels and windmills when they think about alternative energy, the field is really much broader than that. It's very exciting to see all the research being done in areas such as biomass, tidal power, geothermal, solar chimneys and so forth.

My expectation is that in the not-too-distant future the tables will turn: what we consider "alternative" today will be the standard tomorrow. Burning fossil fuels will be oddball alternative.

About the Author

If you want to find out much more about alternative energy, a great place to visit is: [Alternative Energy Primer](#)

Source: <http://www.thinkgreenarticles.com>