

## Buy Products Made with Renewable Energy by Steve Kotkette

Recently Governor Doyle suggested Wisconsin could become the Saudi Arabia of renewable energy. Doing so would be extremely beneficial for the state in many ways, even if you're not a believer in global warming. Seventy percent of the U.S. economy is consumer driven, and if consumers started consciously spending their money on the thousands of products made with renewable energy, it could help clean the air, and the water.

It feels strange living in an era when life often seems to be regressing in the very places it started. When I was young, the DNR did not recommend limiting your intake of Wisconsin caught fish. Then in the late 60s, a short stretch of the Fox River polluted by paper mills was so polluted the DNR recommended people eat a limited number of fish from these waters. Since the late 60s the number of Wisconsin waters with DNR fish consumption limitations slowly grew over the years, until a few years ago the DNR recommended fish consumption limitations for fish caught in all Wisconsin lakes, rivers, ponds, and streams. This is not progress.

If you want to reduce acid rain, when you buy products, try to buy products made from renewable energy. If you want to reduce mercury pollution, buy products made from renewables. If you want to reduce particulate matter in the air, buy products made from renewables. If you want to help those with respiratory problems, which might include yourself and/or people you know, buy products made from renewables.

The benefits of buying products made from renewable energy go well beyond cleaning our air and water, but those benefits aren't the subject of this effort. If Wisconsin businesses see other Wisconsin businesses doing well because they're using renewable energy, it would encourage other businesses in the state to start using renewable energy too. In fact, if Wisconsin got a reputation as having savvy consumers who buy products made from renewable energy, might it encourage some manufacturers wanting to use renewable energy to move to Wisconsin because they like the idea of being surrounded by consumers with a history of wanting to buy products made from renewable energy?

If Wisconsin became the state that used renewable energy to produce a higher percentage of its goods than any other state, might that mean that ten, twenty, thirty years from now Wisconsin goods will be more exportable than goods from other states? Because ten, twenty, thirty years from now, isn't it possible consumers throughout the world will have figured out the many benefits of buying products made from renewable energy? Some consumers might find greater inspiration to buy products made with renewable energy when they hear that China, which sits atop more coal than any nation, will be building

500 new coal-fired power plants in the next ten years. For those who believe in global warming, that could be nightmarish, and needs to be addressed. Might coal not only drive China's Herculean rise, but also cause it to stagnate economically by inspiring consumers to one day shun Chinese products because of its massive use of coal and a growing world economy based on renewable energy? Let's hope China might be wise enough to use its new found wealth to create energy in a less polluting manner.

Finally, it seems like years ago when the mainstream media identified global warming as a serious problem, it has also had the attitude that our only hope is waiting for our government and other governments to, in all their wisdom, save us. The truth is we, as consumers, may have more power to save ourselves than any government or governments. But for consumers to play an important role in this we'll have to see some evolution. Most Americans can't name one product made from renewable energy now, and that will have to change.

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