

Vermont's Energy Future

ONLINE CONFERENCES | *FINAL REPORT*

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Stephen Wark

Director, Consumer Affairs and Public Information

Vermont Department of Public Service

112 State Street

Montpelier, Vermont 05620

E-mail: Stephen.wark@state.vt.us

VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Online Conferences | Summary of Results

OVERVIEW

The language in Act 208 not only directed the Department of Public Service to provide education for participants on energy, but also directed the department to create a methodology that could be readily duplicated for other issues under consideration. Given the nature of the Internet and the increasing role technology plays in all Vermonters lives, a web-based approach was identified as an innovative means of reaching out to people who may have not been able to participate in a traditional meeting.

The Department of Public Service purchased a software package intended to facilitate online conferences. Staff of DPS received training on how to use the software, and Burlington Telcom provided access to the software. To maintain as much consistency as possible, the regional workshop survey was re-created in the online environment. Preceding topics were drafted that were designed to be open-ended and engender discussion.

After reviewing the demographic information of participants at the regional workshops and the deliberative polling event, it became clear that the residential rate class was well represented; however business and industry representation was much lower. Given that information, it was decided that the conferences would be made available to the general public that had registered through Raab Associates were not able attend a workshop, as well as associations and organizations that could reach out to verifiable Vermont populations who were interested in participating. This turned out to be a necessary step, as at least one out of state anti-nuclear organization attempted to flood the conferences with their membership. After all conferences were complete, the DPS staff identified two additional participants who were resided out of state. Because of this, their results were removed from the sample.

The following groups hosted events, through their memberships:

| GROUP | CONTACT | STATUS |
|---|----------------------------|------------------|
| Regional Workshop overflow/ registered | Steve Wark / Jonathan Raab | Completed |
| Champlain Chamber of Commerce | Frank Cioffi | Completed |
| Regional Planning Commissions | Jim Matteau | Completed |
| Associated Industries of Vermont | Bill Driscoll | No participation |
| Vermont Retail Association | Tasha Wallis | No participation |
| Vermont Energy Partnership | Brad Ferland | No participation |
| Vermont Chamber of Commerce | Duane Marsh | Completed |
| Vermont Business Roundtable | Lisa Ventress | Completed |
| PEP Advisors | Steve Wark | Completed |
| VT Ski Association | Parker Riehle | Completed |

The people who participated in the ten online conferences represented a sample of people best identified as business or industry related. In total, 75 people participated in the online conferences, and provided results that paralleled the regional workshops.

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It should be noted that these conferences were conducted in December of 2007, during a time when the holiday season was reported to have greatly decreased people's ability to participate. Also, some groups did not have an interest in participating due to time commitments or other factors. Nonetheless, 75 participants do provide a depth of insight that should be considered, and in fact represents a larger audience than attended the St. Johnsbury regional workshop.

The participants comments were recorded in the online conferences were captured and documented in the detailed report for the online conferences. They can be summarized as having a deep regard for Vermont's environmental resources, and are associated with a concern for the role of energy in global climate change.

Environment - Participants related that they were concerned about pollutants, greenhouse gases, and sustainability.

Resource Prioritization – The highest priorities identified were efficiency, wind and nuclear power; the lowest priorities were identified as coal, oil and nuclear power. Nuclear power was duplicated due to the nature of the survey (participants could select the top *and* bottom three).

Energy Efficiency – Participants indicated a preference (53%) for increased spending on efficiency measures. About 2/3's of the participants thought efficiency could be used in lieu of new generation.

Renewables - 23% thought the current levels of renewables was acceptable, while 72% believed that Vermont should increase the amount of renewables used.

Wood - Wood was a relatively innocuous topic in the online conferences. It was neither selected nor de-selected as a potential source of future generation.

Hydro Quebec - 94% of the conference participants believed the state should continue to purchase power from Hydro Quebec. Additionally, a large majority believed hydroelectric power is environmentally friendly.

Vermont Yankee - As in the other parts of the public engagement process, nuclear power is a divided issue. While the topic was initially divided, support grew to 73% when participants were confronted with a choice between VY and oil, coal, gas or out of state nuclear power.

Rate Issues - Participants tended to favor choice and economy in regard to rate issues. There was slight support for dynamic pricing.

Generation - A majority preferred contracts or had no preference for new power, vs. utility owned facilities.

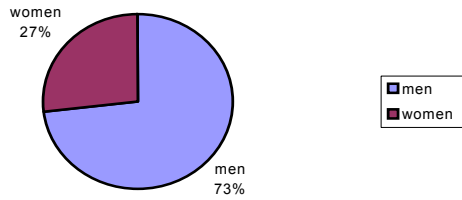
Size - Participants appeared to prefer smaller, decentralized facilities that were suggestive of a renewable strategy.

Location - Conference participants appeared to be indifferent to the location of where power was generated.

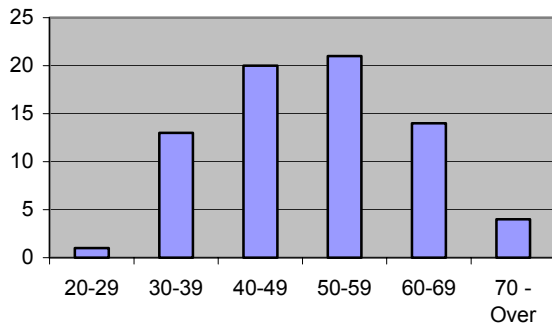
The following charts represent the final data that was collected from the online conferences.

SERIES 1: WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE ONLINE CONFERENCE

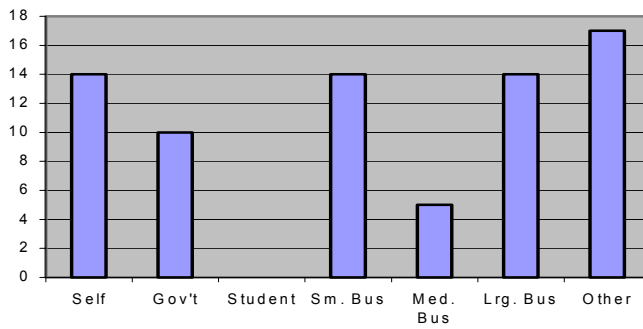
How do you identify yourself?

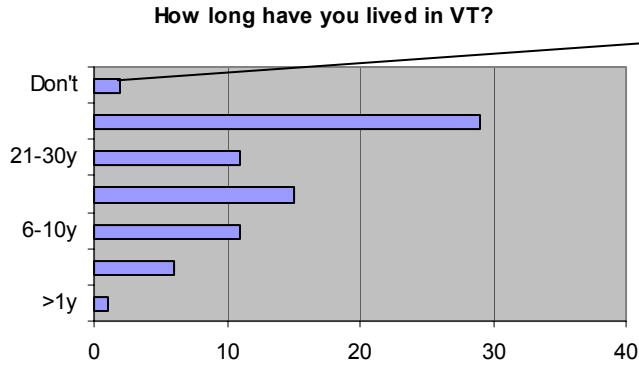


What is your age?



How are you employed?



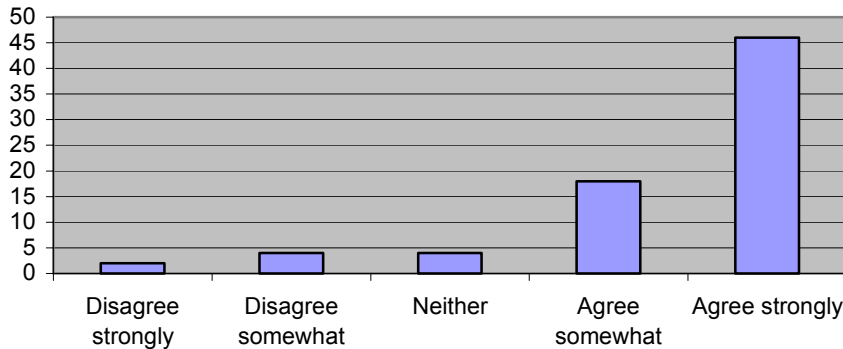


This data was removed from consideration as the participants self-identified as residing outside of the State of Vermont.

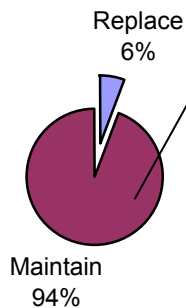
The participants also self-identified as having attended some college through graduate-level classes, and described themselves as “Democrats”, “Independents”, or “Republicans” respectively.

SERIES 2: POLICY AND VALUES

Vermont should continue to buy power from Hydro Quebec

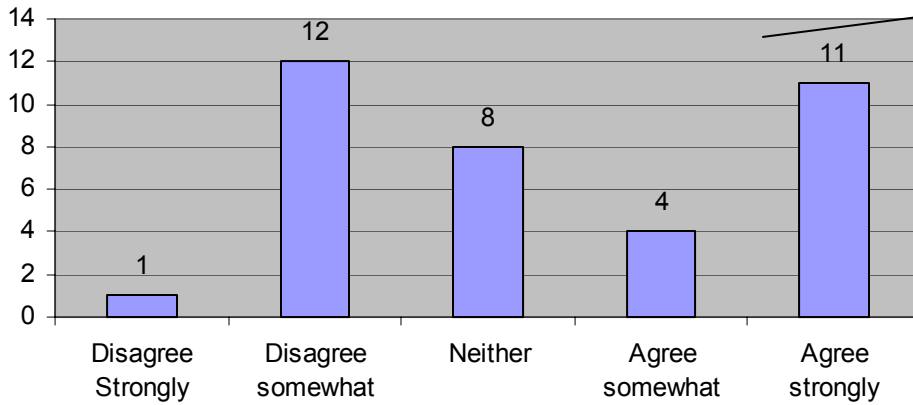


Should VT replace HQ with Coal, Oil, or Gas, or Maintain?



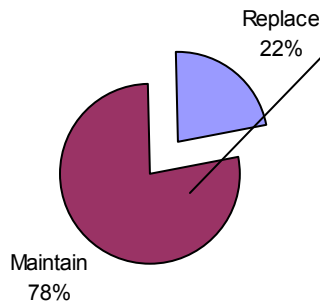
The question was a forced decision type, designed to test the limits of tolerance. In this case, it read, “Hydro Quebec provides base load power, meaning power is usually available 24/7. If you learned that discontinuing power from HQ would require another base load source of power, and that only natural gas, coal, out of state nuclear power, or oil were available to replace this power, would you choose to...”

Should VT continue to buy power from Vermont Yankee?



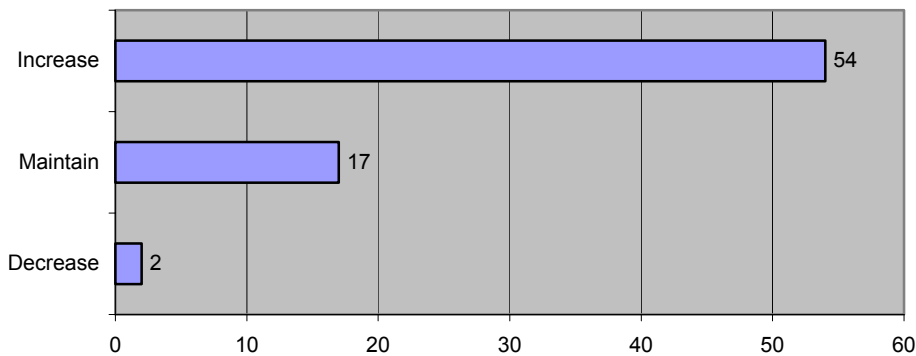
Several people refused to answer this question. A similar reaction occurred at the regional workshops.

Should VT replace VY with Coal, Oil, Gas or Nuke?

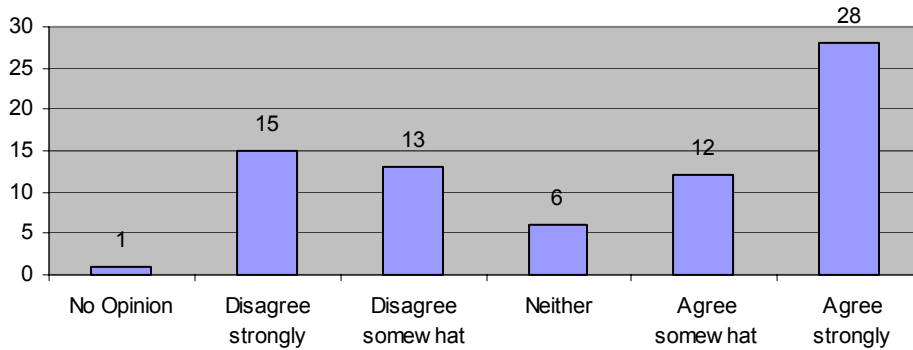


The question was a forced decision type, designed to test the limits of tolerance. In this case, it read, "Vermont Yankee provides base load power, meaning power is usually available 24/7. If you learned that discontinuing power from VY would require another base load source of power, and that only natural gas, coal, out of state nuclear power, or oil were available to replace this power, would you choose to..."

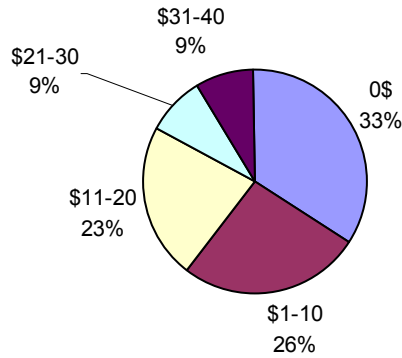
Over the next 10 years, should renewables:



VT should require a minimum of power to be renewables

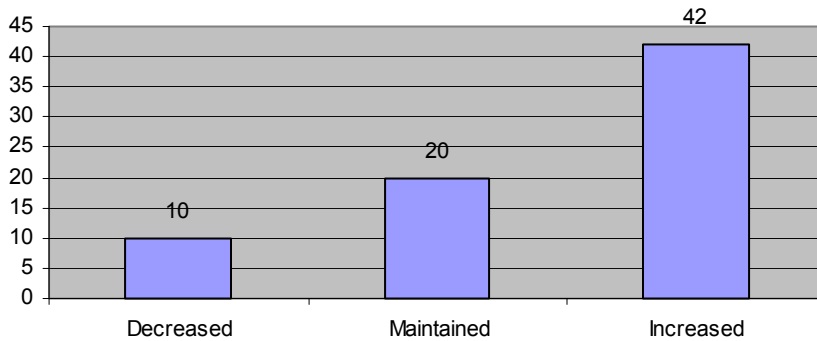


How much more / month would you pay for renewables?

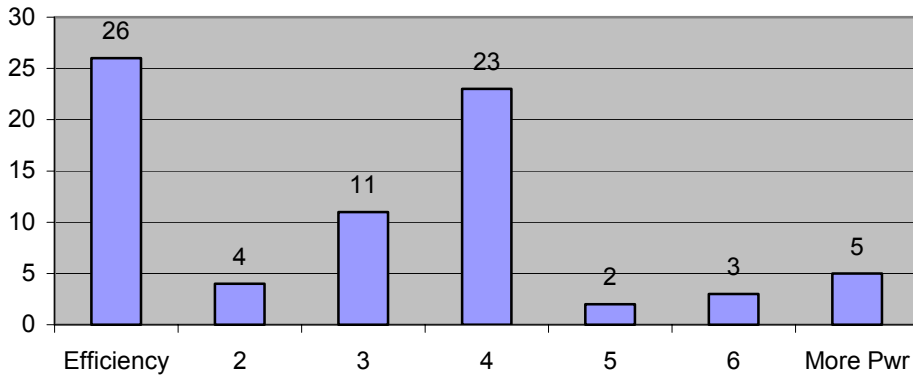


Note: On the issue of “where the power from renewables should be used”, a slight majority expressed an interest in it remaining in state.

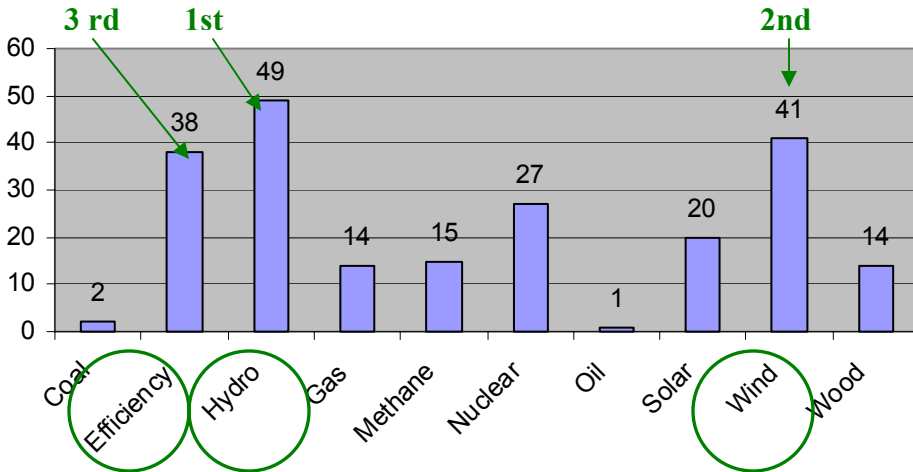
Over the next 10 years, spending for efficiency should be:



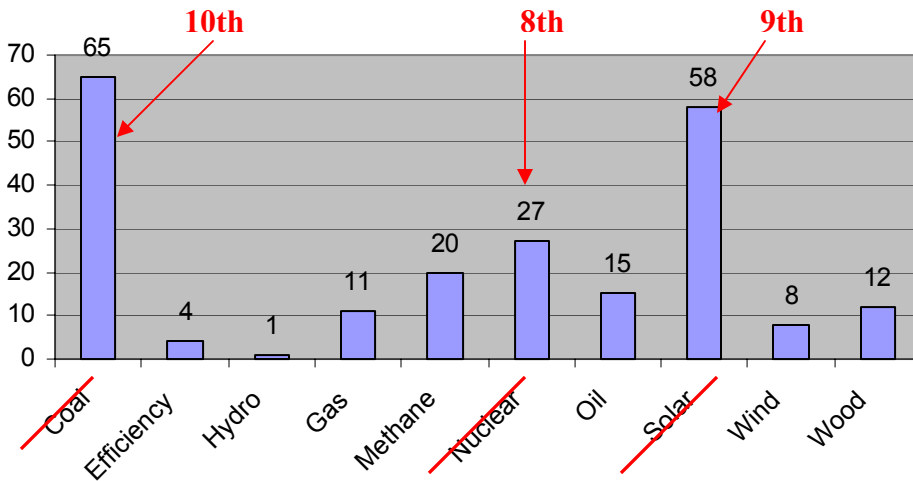
To meet future demand, VT should use efficiency (1) or obtain more power (7):



What are the three highest energy priorities?



What three options should be the lowest priority?



NUCLEAR NOTES

Each of these questions allowed the participant to choose their three highest and three lowest priorities.

In the "highest" question, different people selected "in" nuclear.

In the "lowest" question, different people selected it "out".

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SERIES 3: DETAILS

When participants were asked what they considered the most important issues facing Vermont on energy, they related the following, from most important to least important:

1. *"Having a reliable supply of electricity";*
2. *"Reducing the emission of gasses that may contribute to climate change";*
3. *"Reducing dependence on foreign energy sources (overseas)";*
4. *"Minimizing air pollution";*
5. *"Getting electricity from resources that will never be used up";*
6. *"Reducing radioactive wastes";*
7. *"Creating jobs in Vermont";*
8. *"Keeping electric rates stable for the consumer";*
9. *"Keeping rates low for the consumer";*
10. *"Avoiding facilities in Vermont that detract from the scenic beauty of Vermont";*
11. *"Using power produced in Vermont".*

When the participants were asked which energy sources they considered a threat to Vermont's scenic beauty, they responded in order of most to least threatening:

1. *"A coal fired electric generating plant";*
2. *"A utility scale wind farm";*
3. *"A natural gas fired electric generating plant";*
4. *"Electricity transmission lines";*
5. *"A residential scale wind farm".*

When asked how concerned they were about each of the following issues, the participants responded and the results were ranked in order of most important to least important:

1. *"Air pollution produced by burning fuel to make electricity";*
2. *"Greenhouse gases produced by burning fuel to make electricity";*
3. *"Radioactive waste from nuclear power plants";*
4. *"Damage to river habitats caused by facilities to produce hydro power";*
5. *"The visual impact of a wind farm on the scenery of Vermont".*

The use of online Internet conferences is unique to governance in Vermont. The technology can play an increasingly important role, if used and facilitated correctly. In this case, we learned lessons that can help future deliberations: shorter polling questions, better advertisement, and hosting by organizations that have the capacity and time to participate. As we proceed forward, the low cost of the software and the ease of use could help other state agencies and organizations engage the people of our state in a way not previously explored.