



Written by [Ed Hiserodt](#) on September 16, 2009

Danish Wind Power Overblown

Two Danish experts in the field of wind energy will be in Washington for the next three days to speak on the subject of wind generated electricity. One would expect they are here to brag on the fact that their country is a leader in the field and that they already satisfy, as President Obama puts it, “20 percent of the electricity through wind power.” One would be wrong in such an expectation. They are here to warn us about the dangers of putting our electricity needs in the wind power basket.



A nation of 5.4 million — between Missouri and Wisconsin in population — the windy nation is “carpeted” with wind turbines. Of the electricity generated from all sources, the 5,500 wind turbines contribute about 19 percent of the country’s electrical demand. But this is far less than the amount utilized by the Danish people, which varies between 5 and 10 percent. Why the disparity? This is explained in a report — “An Assessment of Danish wind power: The real state-of-play and its hidden costs” ([pdf](#)) — authored by Hugh Sharman, an engineer and founder of a company specializing in off-shore structures. It is Mr. Sharman and Martin Agerup, chief executive officer of Copenhagen-based Center for Politiske Studier, who are in the U.S. to alert American audiences of what the true energy situation is in Denmark.

Concerns are many, primarily the problem of system instability when the wind energy component nears 10 percent in most applications. Electricity has a value based not just on the power produced, but on when it is available. When there is over-capacity, power is sold by West Denmark to customers in Germany and to the UCTE grid in Europe. In a similar situation, power from West Denmark (the East and West grids are



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not connected) is sold to Finland, Sweden, and Norway. Norway uses a portion of this for pumped storage thus increasing its value. Since this occurs when the electrical demand by Denmark's customers is also low, the electricity is sold below cost — the difference being made up by taxes and residential rate payers. (Industrial customers are given very preferential treatment in electricity pricing policy.)

Unfortunately for the Danes, when the winds aren't blowing to produce sufficient power, they then become the customers of their customers. But now the value of the electricity is very high. As a consequence the Danish people have the highest electric rates of any industrialized nation, an average of about \$.38 per kWh compared to \$.08 in the United States.

It could be much worse were it not for the countries that Denmark is tied to by electrical grids and that consume about 100 times the power of Denmark. These countries act as a kind of energy spring: When Denmark has an excess, they have a place to put it rather than shutting down their wind farms. When power is needed, other suppliers provide a ready source to step in and ship the necessary megawatt-hours. The United States is not in such a position. We have no energy "big brother" to come to our rescue. We, then, must have generating capabilities necessary to back up all the unreliable wind power and consequently cannot safely shut down any of our current generating plants, and indeed must build more back-up conventional plants anytime the grid needs additional capacity.

The other big mistake that the United States is being pushed toward by environmentalists and their patron in the White House is that of "green jobs." Jobs in the wind industry are always subsidized. When a worker in a non-subsidized industry moves into a subsidized one, there is a double hit on the economy: The "green" job requires the government to take capital from the economy, and the loss of the non-subsidized job precludes the creation of wealth. Much as in Spain where "green jobs" can require a subsidy of \$1,000,000 per job, wind-related jobs in Denmark are subsidized at the rate of 175 to 250 percent above average pay, roughly costing taxpayers \$90,000 to \$140,00 for each "green" employee.

Thomas J. Pyle, president of the Institute for Energy Research (IER) that commissioned the report, is unequivocal in his warning: "In the case of Denmark, you have a nation of 5.4 million, occupying some of the most wind-intense real estate in Europe — and it still doesn't even come close to the 20 percent threshold envisioned by President Obama for the United States. This may indeed be the model for the future — but only if you believe that a combination of smoke, mirrors, and prohibitively high utility rates are the key to our economic and environmental salvation."



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