

Solar Power

My name is David Gordon, and I own and operate a sawmill, as well as a cedar log home and cedar fence manufacturing business in Oakfield, Maine. This past summer, my sawmill burned down, and I have been exploring the possibility of rebuilding a mill of similar size and capacity. One of the major cost factors is electricity—I currently pay \$0.25 per kWh. My competitors for cedar logs are Canadian shingle mills, mostly located in Quebec, where electricity costs only \$0.08 per kWh.

Because of this significant discrepancy in manufacturing costs, they can afford to pay more for cedar logs, making it very difficult for me to compete. They also have other cost advantages, such as significantly lower workers' compensation insurance rates. However, the high electricity costs may be the final obstacle to remaining competitive.

Currently, I have 28 employees—down from 80—and I am operating a portable sawmill to determine if there is a viable path forward. This portable sawmill is powered by a diesel generator, which generates electricity at a cost of \$0.17 per kWh, compared to the \$0.25 per kWh I pay through my Versant Power bill.

There is a clear economic advantage to using the diesel generator instead of purchasing power from the grid. I am also aware of another local business that may soon begin operating its backup generator for the same reason. This completely contradicts the goal of promoting green, renewable energy, yet businesses may have no choice if they are to survive.

I am a strong proponent of solar energy. I have had solar collectors at my home in Oakfield, Maine, since 1981. Currently, I have 27 photovoltaic collectors installed on my back lawn. Originally, I had them mounted on my barn roof. When I asked the salesman about snow and ice buildup, he assured me that they would slide off naturally. He was correct—by March.

For the first two winters, I climbed onto the roof with a garden hose filled with hot water to melt the snow and ice, as they could not be reached from the ground. By the third year, I removed them from the roof and installed them on the ground, where my wife and I now clean them off 12 to 20 times each winter. Without regular cleaning, production would be nearly zero from December through February.

This represents a massive investment and state subsidy for just nine months of production. If these panels were located in southern Maine, they would mostly clear themselves throughout the winter.

While generating electricity from solar panels is an environmentally friendly energy solution, the policy of subsidizing it at the expense of Maine ratepayers is deeply flawed.

The solar subsidies that the state of Maine is granting—primarily to out-of-state companies—are unfair, unreasonable, and are crippling Maine businesses before our very eyes.

Please stop these solar subsidies and restore common sense to our state's energy policies.