

Shirat Hanefesh
Ruach/Wind Challenge FAQ
(Short Answers, and Detailed Answers)
by Our Resident Maven
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Questions:

- 1) Is it going to cost me more?
- 2) How does it really work, will I actually get the wind power at my house?
- 3) Why are you recommending Constellation Energy?
- 4) Are there other suppliers that are acceptable?
- 5) What if I am on Pepco's "surge program" for controlling energy use in the summer?
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- 10) What is Pepco's current electricity made from?
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- 19) Why is it called the "Ruach Challenge"?

1) Is it going to cost me more?

Short answer – very little, at most about 1-5% more per month (a few dollars). It might also save the same amount!

Detailed answer:

- a) IF you have never switched your supplier (generation portion of bill), never done anything like this before, then you are on the Pepco "Standard" rate. (You can confirm this by checking your Pepco bill third page. You will NOT see another company name.) The current 24 and 36-month Constellation 100% wind rate is only 1.3% higher than Pepco's rate! And since generation is roughly half the bill, your actual price increase is only 0.7% more! This will be about \$2-7 per month, to get completely off coal, gas, and nuclear for your electricity.

- b) If you have switched previously, it's best to call your alternative supplier, I'm sorry for the extra step. Pepco does not list the actual price from the supplier company on its bill, just the kWh you used and the monthly charge. You can either call the supplier's customer service number, or divide your generation cost in a month by the kWh. It can be hard to read off the cents/kWh accurately, so I'd recommend calling the company to be sure.

2) How does it really work, will I actually get the wind power at my house?

Short Answer: "Wind electrons" may not come to your house-but the wind part of the grid increases.

Detailed answer:

The electrons from a wind farm (the actual electricity) does not probably arrive at your house. But Pepco is required to pay a wind farm company for the environmental benefit of your specific electricity usage. So the wind farms get their money based on how much wind customers purchase, and the proportion of wind in the national grid increases due to your purchase. Because this is indirect, a national system of renewable energy credits (RECs) was established. RECs are generated at the source, by a wind or solar company, and are uniquely numbered certificates representing the environmental and social benefits of 1 megawatt of power. When a REC is sold that number is retired, so that benefit can't be sold twice. (What does that mean?) More information can be found on the EPA website including a video:

<https://www.epa.gov/greenpower/renewable-energy-certificates-recs>

3) Why are you recommending Constellation Energy?

Short answer: It is the least expensive, proven reliable provider of 100% wind in our area.

Detailed answer:

Many companies provide 100% wind supply in our area, and some supply the 100% "renewable/RPS" that climate activists don't consider actually renewable, as explained below. But the majority are small companies, that don't have the resources for good customer call centers, and offer higher prices. Sometimes people can create a group to bargain for lower rates, but that takes a lot of energy and time and more commitment on the part of the homeowners. And we want something that people can do themselves, and don't lock us into a group program.

4) Are there other suppliers that are reasonable?

Short answer: Yes, including two used by members of Shirat Hanefesh, with good reputations.

Detailed answer:

Here are their links if you'd like to check them out as well:

Clean Choice Energy – local business, very clean energy, special "e-certified" wind RECs – more expensive

<https://cleanchoiceenergy.com/how-it-works/pricing-plans/>

WGL – subsidiary of Washington Gas, very reliable, special "e-certified" wind RECs – medium expensive

<http://www.wglenergy.com/>

5) What if I am on Pepco’s “Surge Program”, where they can control my thermostat to temporarily turn off air conditioning during high use times?

Short answer: No problem – they are two completely separate programs.

Detailed answer:

The “surge protection” is handled just by Pepco – it has to do with controlling the delivery of the power to your home. That’s an entirely Pepco program. It cycles off your power in times of high demand to avoid system-wide brownouts. The source that Pepco buys your power from is a different contracting mechanism within Pepco. Nancy called Pepco to confirm this after an inquiry.

(Note this is not true “surge protection”, which you can only do with surge protection equipment in your house. It’s just the term people use for the temporary reduction/cycling program.)

6) What is the exact deadline?

Short answer: The end of Tu B’Shvat, sunset on January 31, 2018 (5:29 pm)

Detailed answer:

This is voluntary, so just do your best! The actual switch takes less than 10 minutes on the web – even 5 minutes. The hardest part is preparation, checking your Pepco bill. The Tikkun Olam committee decided that a deadline was necessary, because many of us have intended to do this for years, so in fact a deadline is the most unique contribution of our challenge!

For those who can’t find their username and password, just let your mentor know, and they’ll email you the link to reset them, or the customer care number to call if that’s easier. This is the part we have to push through to stop climate change, so no time like the present!

Also, with Purim and Pesach coming, this is a great time of year to get it done. Otherwise it might wait months more, and produce more dirty air and climate change.

We are supposed to rush to do mitzvot, so here’s a great opportunity to do so!

7) What if I move away from the area?

Short answer: Constellation waives the cancellation fee if you move or sell your house.

Detailed answer:

If you choose a different provider than Constellation, it’s a good idea to call them and check. Or check the “Terms and Conditions” link on your provider’s website, for your plan. All of them probably waive the fee.

8) My alternate supplier says my current supply is “RPS” – what’s that? Is it green?

Short answer: RPS=Maryland’s “Renewable Portfolio Standard”. It is 50% “dirty fuels” producing CO2.

Detailed answer:

The Maryland state legislature established a renewable energy standard, which defines the types of sources that the utility companies can call “renewable”. Unfortunately, it includes over 50% “dirty fuels”, including burning chicken manure on the Eastern Shore, burning trash, and even burning wood pellets from old-growth forest cutting in Virginia. The environmental movement lobbies the state legislature every spring to drop these dirty fuels, and they do not significantly change.

9) My bill lists WGL on the third page of my Pepco bill, with my plan being “RPS + 95% wind”. What’s that, and is it green?

Short answer: It’s nearly green and it will count towards our 100% goal. See RPS definition above.

Detailed answer:

The Maryland state legislature requires each utility to have a minimum “renewable” portion of wind generation. It’s very small, and the “renewable” standard includes a lot of dirty fuels, see above. So WGL starts with the required minimum, and then adds on the rest from wind power.

Note that WGL is about 8% more expensive than Constellation’s 24 month plan, which is a clean 100% wind.

10) What is Pepco’s current electricity made from?

Short answer: Coal, natural gas, and nuclear.

Detailed answer:

Coal 32.7%

Gas 24.8%

Nuclear 36.5%

Oil 0.2%

Renewable <5%

Beyond the climate change/CO2 issue, don’t forget the toxic chemicals created by burning fossil fuels particularly mercury, the build up of radiation in our environment from long-term low level nuclear industry emissions, and fracking producing the natural gas.

Yuck.

11) What if I have already chosen an alternate supplier, as the third page of my Pepco bill shows?

Short answer: If 100% wind, let us know. If not, call them to research exit options, ask for our help.

Detailed answer:

The industry has three types of contract exit conditions. For instance, if you’re in a 2-year contract, there might be a cancellation fee, or not. Some cancellation fees are “sliding scale”, so if you’re close to the end of the contract period, there can be very little fee. Generally I think the larger companies have fees, and the littler ones forgo them, in order to attract customers.

Another option is to switch to 100% renewable within the company you’ve got. If you switch within the company to a 100% wind plan, they should waive any cancellation fee. Constellation definitely waives the fee, don’t know about WGL.

12) What happens at the end of my 24-month or 36-month Constellation contract?

Short answer: They will offer a couple of low rates, which may not be wind – contact Constellation.

Detailed answer:

The company will send a letter/email that the end of the contract period is coming. The letter should indicate the replacement contract if no action is taken. You may also receive letters/emails from them proposing a replacement that is not wind, though it won’t say that. It would be nice if the Maryland Public Service Commission required full disclosure of the source of electricity in all solicitations, so it’s

clear when you're choosing renewable or non-renewable fuels. Perhaps that's something we can work on for the future. Basically, you need to monitor the communications towards the end of the period, and as of now, contact Constellation to tell them you want your replacement contract is 100% wind. Constellation's call center has been helpful on these matters in the past. Perhaps put a reminder in December of your calendar to "call when get electricity renewal letter", and carry that reminder forward each year. Hopefully they'll get the message and specify a wind replacement contract by that time!

13) Do you recommend 24 month or 36 month contracts?

Short answer: It's really up to you, but a slight preference for 24 months.

Detailed answer:

This is really a matter of preference. But on a larger perspective, 24 months gives more flexibility, in case you (or Shirat Hanefesh) wants to make a different choice. But the 36 month gives more stability to your budget, and reduces the monitoring of the contract end period, to ensure you stay on the 100% wind, which we need to do with any supplier.

I found that Constellation was very helpful in changing my plan within Constellation with no charge, so feel confident they will provide good customer support.

14) What is "national wind" and "regional wind"? Which is better, regional?

Short answer: National wind is the much better choice. Please do not choose local or regional wind.

Detailed answer:

"National wind" allows the wind industry to site the wind mills wherever the siting guidelines say is best. Normally in environmental choices, local or regional is better, but here it's the opposite. Wind mills do have an environmental impact – they kill birds, and they also "mix" cooler upper air with lower air, slightly drying out the earth. They also make some noise, and create a "strobe" light effect for moonlight for people living nearby. So it's important for the industry to have maximum flexibility in siting to minimize these impacts. Our Appalachian mountains would be great, except they're the major eastern flyway for migrating birds. So we don't want to encourage local or regional wind, and influence the market in that direction.

We also need to support more research and prevention of death of birds. The experience of the first major wind farms in California many years ago led to federal siting guidelines that take this into account. Unfortunately, a company in western Maryland was given a two-year exemption from these guidelines years ago, and we have some remedial policy work to do to clean this up.

But in perspective, the mercury from coal plants also kills birds, particularly those that each fish from our Potomac River and the Chesapeake. So we just have to focus on continuous improvement in our energy solutions.

15) We have solar panels – isn't that enough?

Short answer: Solar panels don't generate 100% in our area – you can switch the rest to wind.

Detailed answer:

Solar panels are definitely a great thing. They may have lower net environmental impact than wind, and more local/individual generation by solar power is definitely necessary for switching the overall national power grid to renewable-every house becoming a little generating station, like they have in Germany (which powered itself 100% off renewable energy on some days last summer! The entire country!) But

in our area, our houses can't support enough panels to generate 100% of our electricity. Some of our members come close, depending on their roof space.

That remaining part is still generated by fossil fuels and nuclear. That's the focus here – to remove the financial incentive to continue running the old coal plants, including the Dickerson trash-to-electricity plant, which puts LOTS of carbon dioxide into the air, and lots of toxics downwind (mercury, lead) that we breathe and falls into the Chesapeake with the rains, and poisons the fish. Shutting this plant is a top priority for our Montgomery County climate activists – you really will make a difference..

The solar companies don't call attention to the type of energy you buy, for the remaining energy your house uses – they are understandably focused on the solar part. So you might not have thought about the remaining part. But that remaining part (if you haven't switched), added up across all the people now in Maryland that have solar – you can see so many panels now on roofs as you drive around – is still a huge total demand for fossil fuels. Let's finish the job, and help close Dickerson.

16) We might want to put on solar panels in the future, will switching to wind affect that?

Short answer: Solar panels will simply reduce your background supplier bill – no problem.

Detailed answer:

Solar panels are a great next step. That is a separate program, and will just reduce the amount of electricity that Pepco has to buy each month from Constellation for your house. The solar panels, whether you own them or have the “rent a roof” business model, reduce or offset the amount of electricity you purchase respectively. So effectively, from a financial standpoint, it's just a reduced bill. Physically, the electrical hookup of your panels is directly with Pepco, and their program handles your generation. When you need electricity beyond what you have produced, that amount will still be under the same Constellation account and wind supply.

17) Can my individual choice really make a difference? My bill is pretty low.

Short answer: OF COURSE! The energy sector has REDUCED its CO2 output, every molecule counts!

Detailed answer:

The Maryland state legislature created this ability to choose our own supplier 10 years ago. Maryland is overwhelmingly liberal, and most of our area is even quite progressive. But very few people have switched. Not only does every molecule count, but you set an example for your friends, you can talk about it at parties knowledgably, and you are an integral part of the Shirat Hanefesh team - we cannot reach 100% without you! Besides – do you only want to save “most of the planet”? What part or species would we not want to save? Saving Creation is a 100% effort, and you are critical to everyone's success. As the rabbis said, it's not up to you to complete the task, but you aren't free to abstain either.

We're all in this together, and every person's effort is equal to every other person's effort!

Also, the energy sector has reduced its CO2 output recently, because of the effectiveness of this wind/solar push. It really is making a difference.

And... you can have just as big a party celebrating a small switch as a big switch!

18) I'm in an apartment and don't pay my own electric bill directly, what can I do to help?

Short answer: Find a friend to switch by Tu B'Shvat! We'll provide the same support and home visit.

Detailed answer:

A CO2 molecule saved is good no matter who produces it. We know how difficult it is to get a condominium management board, or management company, to switch its policy. So while you work on the long-term plan of talking to your neighbors and bringing this up at condo meetings, just email out our information (instructions, FAQ) to a huge bunch of friends, ask for their help to meet your deadline, and see what happens! You get credit on the SHN 100% challenge for your first friend that switches. Just get the company they switched to, and email Nancy with the info. (nancy@nancywallace.com) This also has another silver lining, in that it pushes this Challenge information out to a new group of people. They can pass it on! And feel free to have any of them contact Nancy for mentoring to start a group-based challenge in their faith community.

19) Why is it called the “Ruach Challenge”?

Short answer: Because Rabbi Langner came up with this great phrase – “ruach” means wind, spirit.

Detailed answer:

Ruach Elohim is found in Bereshit (Genesis) 1:2 as “the spirit of God”, or sometimes called “the divine wind.” Let’s use it to save Creation, and remind ourselves that spirit must be an integral part of powering ourselves at all times.