

Geothermal Energy: Power from the Earth



Jeff Hullem/PIX04133

The drilling of production wells, such as these at The Geysers (above) and Imperial Valley (opposite) in California, accounts for a third to a half of the cost of a geothermal project. About 10,000 people are directly employed in the geothermal electric industry.

Overview

Geothermal power is a commercially proven renewable resource. Geothermal generating capacity in the United States is currently about 2300 MW, distributed among baseload power plants located in four states — California, Nevada, Utah, and Hawaii. Geothermal energy accounts for around 2% of the country's renewable-source electric generating capacity.

In 1996, the U.S. geothermal energy industry as a whole provided about 12,300 direct domestic jobs, and an additional 27,700 indirect domestic jobs. The electric generation part of the industry employed about 10,000 people to install and operate geothermal power plants in the United States and abroad, including power plant construction and related activities such as exploration and drilling; indirect employment was about 20,000.

Success Stories

Providing Jobs and Tax Revenue

Nevada's geothermal plants produce about 210 MW of electricity, saving energy imports equivalent to 800,000 tons of coal or three million barrels of oil each year. Although California has much greater installed capacity, Nevada, with just over a million residents, uses more geothermal energy *per capita* than anywhere else in the country.

Taxes received from geothermal operations are a significant source of revenue for Nevada's local and state governments. In 1993, Nevada's geothermal power plants paid \$800,000 in county taxes and \$1.7 million in property taxes. In addition, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management collects nearly \$20 million each year in rent and royalties from geothermal plants