

South Dakota produces a lot from wind without mandates

By [Bob Mercer](#) on Jun 2, 2015 at 4:47 p.m.

PIERRE—South Dakota ranked fourth nationally in percentage of electricity generated from renewable sources such as wind and hydropower during 2014, according to an annual index released Tuesday by a consulting firm.

When measured only for wind-generated electricity, South Dakota finished second with 25.29 percent.

Iowa led the way at 28.53 percent. Kansas was third at 21.67 percent.

But the report from Clean Edge showed South Dakota lagged in five other key measures: Solar generation, hybrid-electric vehicles, electric vehicles, LEED building deployment and smart-meter usage.

South Dakota also sat near the bottom of the 50 states in policy mandates and incentives for renewables and in financial capital for renewables.

The overall result put South Dakota at 39th in Clean Edge's full index. North Dakota, Nebraska and Wyoming were in the bottom 10 below South Dakota.

Clean Edge is based in the San Francisco, Calif., and Portland, Ore., areas. California placed first again in 2014, followed by Massachusetts, Oregon, Colorado and New York.

South Dakota's position in the index might be symbolized through a state law approved in 2008.

The Legislature directed that 10 percent of South Dakota's electricity sold at retail should come from renewable, recycled and conserved energy sources by 2015—but compliance was voluntary and there wasn't a penalty for falling short.

Electricity providers are required to submit annual reports to the state Public Utilities Commission. The agency, in turn, provides its own report each Dec. 31 to the Legislature.

In the PUC's latest report, covering 2013 submissions from the providers, the commission said all utilities operating in South Dakota were procuring renewables and pursuing energy efficiency.

However, the commission noted: "As a result, most South Dakota utilities will have the ability to source 10 percent of their energy needs from renewables or energy efficiency in 2015.

"However, most are currently choosing not to report compliance with South Dakota's voluntary RRCEO (renewable, recycled and conserved energy objective) since either holding or selling their RECs (renewable energy certificates) is more of a benefit for their ratepayers than compliance with the RRCEO."

The report covering 2013 data from the 13 providers serving South Dakota covered 220 pages. It is at www.puc.sd.gov/commission/Energy/REO/20141231rrceoreport.pdf.

The 2008 legislation also reflected ambivalence among South Dakota's lawmakers. The House of Representatives voted 66-3 for the measure, whose prime sponsor was then-Rep. Joel Dykstra, R-Canton. The Senate tally was 29-6.

The House opponents were Democrats who argued the bill didn't accomplish much. The Senate opponents were Republicans who didn't want a goal at all.

In 2009, legislators added "conservation and energy efficiency" to the law. No one voted against that measure in either chamber.

PUC chairman Chris Nelson said Tuesday that South Dakota is about 13 months away from knowing whether its voluntary 10 percent target is reached.

"The reports from the utilities for 2015 compliance are due July 1, 2016, so we don't have a firm answer to the question yet. That said, having observed past reports and knowledge of what the various companies have done and are doing, it appears that most, if not all, of the utility companies will be positioned to meet or exceed the goal."

Nelson noted: "I usually don't comment on ranking reports done by out-of-state folks who create their own criteria which may or may not be relevant to the needs of South Dakota."