

Survey Finds New England Consumers Remain Concerned about Climate Change and Energy Affordability

Survey results released today by the New England Energy Alliance identify broad trends in public attitudes and underlying convictions that can help shape regional energy policies.

Concerns about Climate Change and Energy Affordability Remain Strong in New England

Environmental and cost concerns are influencing New England consumer stances on energy policies, according to an annual, region-wide telephone survey sponsored by the New England Energy Alliance.

Three out of four survey respondents said they were at least somewhat concerned about the effects of climate change, with about half being "very concerned" - a level of concern that declined last year, but is back on the rise.

However, even with this high level of concern, a plurality of respondents (41 percent) volunteered that they would not be willing to pay more on their electric bills to limit the effects of climate change.

This may be because an overwhelming 83 percent of survey respondents said they were concerned about the affordability of energy in New England, with 42 percent being "very concerned." These findings are not surprising given that New England households continue to pay over fifty percent more for electricity than the national average and about thirty percent more for natural gas.

On the political front, about 40 percent said their governor is doing either an "excellent" or "good" job on energy policy, while about 30 percent rated their governor's energy policy work as "fair". Only 14 percent said their governor was doing a "poor" job.

"Conducting this annual survey enables the identification of consumer insight on many of the energy policies currently being debated in New England," said Alliance Executive Director Paul Afonso. "This year, while we saw substantial concern for the environment, New England consumers continue to view regional energy issues from a largely economic perspective."

Below are consumer insights on several policy issues currently being debated within the region:

The telephone survey of 500 registered voters in the six New England states was conducted for the New England Energy Alliance by Opinion Dynamics.

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- **Diverse Preferences for New Energy Infrastructure:** Over half of the region's electricity is generated by natural gas resulting in some of the highest electricity prices in the country due to pipeline constraints in the winter when the fuel is used for both electricity generation and space heating. When respondents were asked which infrastructure option they preferred to alleviate the pipeline constraints, support was highest for increasing the use of renewable resources like wind, solar and hydro by building new transmission lines paid for by a surcharge on electric bills. Ranked a close second, was the implementation of an "all-resource" approach including construction of new natural gas pipelines, more energy efficiency, increased reliance on renewables, and more shipments of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Only 25 percent were "completely opposed" to building new natural gas pipelines. But 62 percent said they were either "strongly opposed" or "somewhat opposed" to "fracking," the technique that uses pressurized water to extract natural gas from rock formations.

- **Increasing Support for Nuclear Energy as a Clean Resource:** Because nuclear power plants, like renewable energy plants, do not produce carbon emissions, a slight majority of respondents (51 percent) now support the idea that nuclear plants should be considered "clean energy" facilities. This reasoning may be behind why about two-thirds (68 percent) either "strongly oppose" or "somewhat oppose" closing the region's three remaining nuclear plants (after Vermont Yankee and Pilgrim shut down).
- **Solid Support for Net Metering, Majority Say Update of Financial Model Needed:** Three-quarters of those surveyed (75 percent) support the idea of "net metering" that allows rooftop solar customers to sell excess electricity back to utilities. However, 57 percent also think that the "net metering" financial model needs to be updated to ensure that some consumers are not "forced" to pay for the solar systems of others.
- **Positive Outlook on Energy Efficiency Programs:** Forty percent of respondents said they have participated in at least one energy efficiency program sponsored by their utility. Of those that have participated, solid majorities agreed that the program: saved them money on their bill (64 percent), helped them reduce energy usage (66 percent) and that it was "easy to participate" in the program (82 percent).

About the Survey

The telephone survey, conducted annually since 2007, consisted of five-hundred land-line and cellphone interviews conducted by Opinion Dynamics between April 14 - 23 with consumers arrayed proportionately among the six New England states. The margin of error is $\pm 4.4\%$.

About the New England Energy Alliance, Inc.

The New England Energy Alliance is a coalition of energy companies advocating to ensure the availability, reliability and affordability of future energy supplies which are vital to the region's economic growth and prosperity. Formed in 2005, the Alliance works to balance public debate about solutions to New England's energy infrastructure by providing information on the region's energy needs and the resources, technologies and policies needed to meet those needs.

Please visit www.newenglandenergyalliance.org for more information on the Alliance.