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CONTACT Barbara DeBaryshe
University of Hawai'i
Center on the Family
808-956-4140
debarysh@hawaii.edu

UH-Mānoa releases report showing strong public support for renewable energy in Hawai'i.

The UH Center on the Family recently produced a report describing results from a statewide survey of public attitudes towards energy generation technologies. The Hawai'i Public Utilities commission is currently reviewing the HECO Companies' Power Supply Plans, which makes this an opportune time to better understand public sentiment. The new UH study is a scientific poll that reflects the opinion of a representative sample of Hawai'i residents. The purpose of the study was to compare levels of public support for renewable energy technologies vs. conventional energy sources and describe key issues shaping people's opinions.

The full report can be viewed and downloaded here:

http://uhfamily.hawaii.edu/publications/brochures/9314e_14101012_COF_RenewableEnergy_Report-FINAL.pdf

Summary

- Hawai'i residents are strong backers of renewable energy, with 97% of the adult population wanting increased development of at least one form of renewable energy. Specifically, 85% of the public was supportive or strongly supportive of "developing more renewable energy sources for the State of Hawai'i." An additional 12% supported particular types of renewables, and only 3% of the public was opposed to or had no opinion about renewable energy.
- Some energy technologies and sources were more favored than others. Solar and wind power were the most widely accepted renewable technologies (with 92% and 86% favorable opinion, respectively), followed by hydroelectric (76%) and geothermal power (75%). Municipal waste (58%) and biomass combustion (53%) were less widely endorsed, but were still acceptable to the majority of residents. Only a small segment of the public endorsed conventional sources of electricity generation—nuclear (22%), oil (13%), and coal (13%).
- When asked why they supported or opposed renewable energy, the issues more often raised were as follows: energy costs (35%), environmental benefits (17%), the need for energy independence (13%), wanting to capitalize on Hawaii's abundant natural resources (12%), and reduced reliance on fossil fuel (11%).

“Everyone in Hawai‘i should be concerned about energy policy and the balance of renewable and conventional energy sources that we use,” says Dr. Barbara DeBaryshe, faculty member of the Center on the Family and co-author of the study. “The economic, environmental, and cultural stakes are so high.” Ivette Rodriguez Stern, also a Center on the Family faculty member and study co-author noted that “Hawai‘i residents are optimistic about the potential of renewable energy and sustainability. Many people feel a sense of urgency, that we have no other option than to find clean replacements for oil-fueled power. There are questions, however, about the cost and environmental impact of renewable technologies.”

This survey provides a valuable snapshot of community attitudes. However, the short, telephone survey format used has some limitations. The survey did not measure the depth and accuracy of people’s knowledge about renewable energy, their personal experience with renewables, or the priority they give to energy policy relative to other social issues.

DeBaryshe emphasized the need for in-depth, unbiased community education about energy issues. This includes the feasibility, value, costs, and possible unintended consequences of different energy technologies, and models for power generation and distribution. “Knowledge is power,” she said. “The more educated we are, the better we are able to weigh in as concerned and informed citizens.”

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The Center on the Family is a unit within the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The Center’s mission is to enhance the well-being of Hawai‘i’s families through interdisciplinary research, education, and community outreach. For more information about the Center, visit www.uhfamily.hawaii.edu.

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