

# Doug Rye *says ...*



## *A better way*

Many people think that I am against renewable energy systems, such as solar and wind. I can assure you that I am not. I admire those who live off the land and use our natural resources wisely. There are, however, only a few in this country who are living “off the grid.” There are a goodly number of others that are generating part of their energy needs from solar, wind or water. In my dreams, I could do that. I could just live at the deer camp and use my little six-inch, 12-volt television while cooking my dinner on a wood or propane stove. I could get my light from a battery- or propane-powered lantern and my water from a well with a hand pump. Actually, I have done that and totally enjoyed it for about ... five days. After that, I wondered how the pioneers made it.

Well, in real life, I think one of the most important discoveries ever is electricity. I consider it an absolute blessing. For the cost of a hamburger, fries and a small drink per day, I can do many wonderful things in our house, such as heat, cool, cook, refrigerate, light and watch football. Make your list and you will agree. With that said, I do not believe in wasting any of our energy resources. I think that producing some of our energy from solar or wind is a noble thought but I have **a better way**.

In the early 1980s, I was working for the federal government to provide low-income housing. In that role, I was responsible for the installation of about 1,000 solar systems. The U.S. government wanted

it done and I did it. It was an exciting time. Two of the systems had 220 solar panels each. Everyone was impressed. Folks would say, “Oh boy, Doug has got it going.”

An engineer from Huntsville, Ala., had a different view, however. He told me I would see the day when I would not want my name associated with these projects. I thought he was crazy. But, unfortunately, he was right. Both systems were total failures in less than 10 years. In fact, nearly all of the systems failed in less than 15 years. I thought there must be **a better way**.

Just over a year ago, I had the opportunity to work with a company that was willing to purchase, install and monitor a quality solar voltaic system and a quality wind generating system. The solar system cost more than \$50,000 installed. The system is monitored daily and has produced an average of 409 kilowatt-hours of electricity per month. This would save about \$50 per month on an electric bill. A simple payback would be \$50,000 divided by \$50 per month equals 1,000 divided by 12 equals 84 years. I think there is **a better way**.

The wind turbine cost \$15,000 installed and has produced about 58 kilowatt-hours a month. This would save about \$7 per month on an electric bill. That would calculate into a simple payback of 180 years. Now I know I have **a better way**.

And being the nice guy that I am, I plan to tell you about it next month. See you then.

*Doug Rye, a licensed architect living in Saline County and the popular host of the “Home Remedies” radio show, works as a consultant for the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas to promote energy efficiency to cooperative members statewide. To order Doug’s video or ask energy efficiency-related questions, call Doug at 1-501-653-7931. More energy-efficiency tips, as well as Doug’s columns, can also be found at [www.ecark.org](http://www.ecark.org)*