

# ENERGY MATTERS



## HOT OFF THE PRESSES: OWNERS OF LOCAL NEWSPAPER SEE THE LIGHT

The Kerkhoven Banner is one of the only newspapers in Minnesota that can say it's powered by solar energy. Ted and Kari Jo Almen, owners of the Banner, think that their conversion to solar is front page news and so do we!

Making solar installations more accessible and affordable for businesses and homeowners across Minnesota has long been a priority for Fresh Energy. We've worked with utilities and policy makers to modernize interconnection standards, keep monthly fixed charges low, and design smart rates that encourage energy efficiency and access to renewable electricity. We're excited to connect the dots on how our policy work has given Minnesotans across the state more clean energy options.

Ted and Kari Jo have been proponents of clean energy for years, but they needed a gentle nudge from their three kids—Jordan, Spencer, and Madeline—to bring solar energy home to the Banner's office in downtown Kerkhoven, a west central Minnesota town.

*"It's not really difficult calculus," said Spencer. "It's pretty obvious if you have an open, sunny space that isn't being used, especially if there is an electrical meter nearby. From there it was just reaching out to a few installers to compare offers."*

Like many commercial spaces in Greater Minnesota, the Banner's building has a large, flat roof, and there are no trees or buildings nearby to obstruct sunlight—perfect conditions for a solar installation. MNSolar, a New London-based company, began installation late last year and in

no time the Banner was capturing rays and accumulating kilowatt-hours. According to the Environmental Protection Agency and the Energy Information Administration, the Banner's switch to solar will save 523.72 tons of carbon over 30 years—equivalent to the carbon emissions for 58,787 gallons of gasoline.

The Almens estimate that their new system will produce more electricity than the newspaper needs, ultimately resulting in a modest payment from their utility, Otter Tail Power. Folks in the Kerkhoven area are taking notice of the Banner's shiny new panels, and Ted and Kari Jo have been fielding questions from other business owners and community members who are interested in learning how solar energy can work for them.

*"If enough people take little steps it will make a big impact," said Ted. "I would love to see our project be a showcase for others."*

At Fresh Energy, we're advocating for a carbon-free future in Minnesota, with large utility-scale wind and solar as well as more clean energy options for families and businesses across the state.

Check out the full story from Kerkhoven Banner reporter Jordan Almen at [fresh-energy.org/banner](https://fresh-energy.org/banner) and learn more about Ted and Kari Jo's path to making this project a reality, as well as the advice they would give to others thinking about installing rooftop solar.



As you may recall, my wife Patsy and I recently bought a plug-in hybrid and as the weather gets warmer, we're looking forward to driving up north.

I'm not worried about the distances we'll be traveling because our plug-in hybrid switches over to gas at about the 26-mile mark, and if we had a fully electric vehicle there are fast charging stations along most major highways.

However, I am concerned that other Minnesotans don't yet have the electric car choices or information they need to take their own carbon-free road trips this summer.

Fresh Energy is working to change that, and you can play a role. We have been intimately involved in supporting Governor Walz and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's proposed Clean Cars Minnesota rulemaking, which will both reduce greenhouse gas pollution from transportation and make it easier for Minnesotans across the state to find and purchase zero- and low-emission vehicles.

The draft rule will be released soon and it's important that all Minnesotans weigh in. We'll post an update on [fresh-energy.org/take-action](https://fresh-energy.org/take-action) when the draft rule is open for feedback. Please plan on commenting and asking your friends and family to weigh in as well—our clean energy future depends upon it!

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LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE AND OTHER STORIES  
 AT [FRESH-ENERGY.ORG](https://fresh-energy.org)

## INTRODUCING THE MIDWEST BUILDING DECARBONIZATION COALITION



Energy use in buildings is the fastest-growing source of carbon pollution in Minnesota—nearly 14 percent of total emissions economy-wide. Fresh Energy, with the support of many partners, is launching a coalition that will work to curb and reverse this growth throughout our region.

While the East and West Coasts are effectively moving away from natural gas and other carbon-intensive fuels for heating and cooling, the Midwest's cold winters, hot summers, and purple state politics require a different approach. Fresh Energy and other coalition members will be establishing groundbreaking new models, sharing and creating equitable best practices, and shaping new policy and regulatory strategies to decarbonize buildings through a network of activities across the Midwest. Stay tuned for updates on this exciting new project.

## ADVANCING ENERGY AND EQUITY AT THE MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE



Fresh Energy is tracking more than 20 clean energy-related bills and staff have testified on important issues like Clean Car Standards, seasonal use of coal plants, and climate change. Woven throughout all of this is our deep commitment to making sure

that Minnesota's clean energy policies have equity at their core—now more than ever.

## TUNE IN TO OUR NEW CLEAN ENERGY PODCAST



Fresh Energy's team of field and thought-leaders includes scientists, economists, and policy analysts who work all day every day to develop and advance Minnesota-focused solutions that secure a clean energy future.

We know it's hard to stay up to speed on all of Fresh Energy's work, let alone the clean energy news in Minnesota. To that end, we're pleased to provide one more way for you to get engaged. Subscribe to "Decarbonize: The Clean Energy Podcast" and hear Fresh Energy staff, and occasional guests, regularly discuss top energy issues in the state, what we are doing, and how energy policy change will contribute to Minnesota's health, economy, and communities. Is there a specific topic you want to hear discussed? Email [olson@fresh-energy.org](mailto:olson@fresh-energy.org) with ideas.

# RESEARCH AND PRESSURE LEAD TO CHANGES IN COAL PLANT PRACTICES

Fresh Energy is continuing to chip away at fossil fuels in the power sector. In December 2019, countless hours of work came to fruition when Xcel Energy announced that it will change how it operates two of its coal plants. The change will lead to a projected 60 percent carbon reduction from these plants. It's rare that such a major dent can be made in Minnesota's greenhouse gas reduction goals and we're proud of the leadership and hard work that Fresh Energy contributed to this effort.

## The details.

Fresh Energy spent hundreds of hours over nearly two years working with utilities and other stakeholders to provide in-depth analysis and advocacy at the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) on how coal plants operate in Minnesota. We learned that coal plants in our state are running at a loss 30 to 60 percent of the time.



*Isabel Ricker, senior policy associate, Energy Markets, was interviewed extensively by Tom Lyden of FOX 9 news about Fresh Energy's research.*

## The outcome.

Due in part to our research, Xcel has announced plans to idle its Allen S. King and Sherco 2 coal plants for six months out of the year and run them only during high electricity use times. Not only that, Xcel is considering changing the way it operates its 11 other coal plants across the country.

## The impact.

Xcel forecasts that its carbon emissions will drop between 46 to 81 percent annually—the equivalent of the yearly emissions from over a million cars. The move will also save \$87 million to \$130 million that Xcel customers will notice when they look at their bills. With this proposal, Xcel is positioning itself as an industry leader in the Midwest and across the country as the electricity sector transitions away from coal.

## What's next.

This March, other public Minnesota utilities filed details on their coal plant operations with the PUC. Fresh Energy is committed to continuing to lead on data analysis and regulatory advocacy with the goal of reducing coal plant operations throughout the state.

We are energized to be steadily reducing Minnesota carbon emissions.

**The clean energy market is moving fast and undergoing lots of change. We plan to be there every step of the way.**

Visit our new **Take Action** page for ways to plug in at [fresh-energy.org/take-action](https://fresh-energy.org/take-action).



## GIVING SMART

John Larsen and his husband Mike Stewart have been enthusiastic donors and supporters of Fresh Energy for five years, and have made quite the impact in our work. John and Mike's generosity stems from an alignment in values, priorities, and a clean energy vision for the future.




"Fresh Energy is tackling some of the biggest problems that stand in our way to reversing global warming. I really appreciate that Fresh Energy does this in a scientific, nonpartisan and equitable way," says John. "I am a firm believer that everyone in Minnesota cares about our air, water, and land, and that this issue has the power to bring us together. Every day people in Minnesota from every background take actions—large and small—to care for our state, and that inspires me."

We are grateful for contributions from Power Circle donors John and Mike. They remind us all that when we work together, we can make great progress in speeding Minnesota's transition to a clean energy economy.

To join the Larsen-Stewart family in powering our communities in a cleaner, more equitable way by becoming a Power Circle donor, please contact Meggie LaValley at [lavalley@fresh-energy.org](mailto:lavalley@fresh-energy.org).

Fresh Energy is your nonprofit energy champion. Look inside for the latest news.

LEARN MORE AT:

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RECENT NEWS | COVID-19 RESPONSE

## FRESH ENERGY IS ON(LINE)

COVID-19 is creating uncertainty throughout Minnesota and Fresh Energy is working to respond in a thoughtful and meaningful way. Visit [fresh-energy.org](https://fresh-energy.org) for more details and updates.

### Utility Response Tracking

Fresh Energy is monitoring and sharing COVID-19-related utility actions, including programs to suspend customer disconnections, arrange payment plans, and extend cold weather rule protections. Fresh Energy supports these actions and will provide regular updates at [fresh-energy.org/mn-utility-responses-covid-19](https://fresh-energy.org/mn-utility-responses-covid-19).

### Virtual Office

Fresh Energy has shifted to a fully remote office as a way to support our employees in their health and family needs—and help our community, state, and country respond to COVID-19. We recognize that many people do not have this option and Fresh Energy will continue to do our part to address systemic inequities in areas where we work.

### Events Moving Online

Fresh Energy staff are in the process of moving all public gatherings and partner meetings to a virtual platform. Like many organizations, we're figuring this out as we go. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

### Leading in a Time of Disruption

The massive disruption we are facing right now will change how our government, economy, and society function in the future. Fresh Energy is your clean energy champion and we are putting our experts to work on turning this volatility into an inflection point for equitable and innovative carbon reduction. As we chart a path forward we are committed to keeping our “feet on the ground and eyes on the sky”—continuing our important work as we pivot toward new ways of ensuring a clean energy economy that benefits all.