

Peterborough This Week
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By Jamie Steel

Bring Hydro Back Into The Discussion

Who would have thought that falling water could do any more than make a splash. The truth is, it can do much more including powering homes and businesses through hydroelectricity says Paul Norris, president of the Ontario Waterpower Association (OWA). "The great thing about hydro is its simplicity," he explains.

"It's an equation that is the distance water falls and how much water you have."

To put it simply, the more water available and the greater the distance it falls, the more hydro that can be produced. "It's that water going through a turbine, so picture a big wheel...that turns a generator and the generator produces electricity," says Mr. Norris.

Waterpower, more commonly known as hydro, comprises about a quarter of the province's energy supply and 90 per cent of Ontario's renewable energy. Right now it is responsible for more than 8,000 megawatts of power, according to OWA.

Which is why the organization is launching a public relations campaign to sing of hydro's praises in communities across the province. Hydro also reduces energy costs, which Mr. Norris says is good news for the province considering the recent announcement by the Ontario Energy Board regarding the price increase for electricity. "Our role in the electricity system, or at least one of our roles, is keeping those prices lower than they otherwise would be," says Mr. Norris. "They expect electricity prices, just for the electricity itself, to double over the next 20 years, so that's about 3.5 per cent a year, compounded," he explains. "If you do the math quickly on that, on average, that's about eight and a half cents a kilowatt hour right now. So that's 17 cents 20 years from now." With hydro, that price is slashed. "All of our hydro is cheaper than that right now. All of our hydro is providing electricity at less than that price right now. If you didn't have hydro you would have higher electricity prices," says Mr. Norris. It isn't just the reduced energy bills that makes this an appealing option, says Mr. Norris. Instead, waterpower is not only affordable but reliable and durable. "We last forever," he says.

"In Campbellford a facility celebrated its 100 year anniversary last year," Mr. Norris explains. "So we're a durable, reliable and again affordable form of electricity."

Mr. Norris recounts the North American blackout of 2003 and boasts of hydroelectricity's role in the recovery process. "This little hydro station at London Street actually ran its electricity to our hospital and kept the hospital running when everyone else was in a black out... If you trace back how we got back up... it was the hydro assets restarting the nuclear assets, restarting the other assets," says Mr. Norris. "So from an energy security perspective, our reliability is incredibly important." Mr. Norris has been with OWA since it started in 2001, but water power has been around much longer. Until 1951, it was Ontario's only source of power, says Mr. Norris. When OWA started it had eight members (hydro facilities). Now it has more than 150. "The newest facility in Ontario is right here in Peterborough, the Robert Lake facility, and some of the oldest are right along the Trent-Severn Waterway. The Trent-Severn Waterway has about 100 megawatts of installed capacity, but to put that into context that's about 50,000 homes," says Mr. Norris. As for what OWA does, it is the organization that represents all hydro power across the province. "We're trying to advance and continue the important role of hydroelectricity, or waterpower in the province of Ontario."