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## FRONTLINES

### Wind Resistance

**There is not a single offshore wind turbine along the U.S. coastline. Some folks say they spoil the view. Should that really matter?**



From the Irish Channel to the gusty shores of the Baltic, giant offshore wind turbines are now spinning in a dozen locations in Europe. More than two dozen new offshore wind farms are either planned or under construction. By some projections, offshore wind could supply as much as 10,000 megawatts (MW) of power by 2010, enough electricity for four million European homes. Germany alone will account for more than a third of this new offshore capacity.

In the United States, by contrast, not a single megawatt of wind energy is produced offshore. True, installed wind capacity has more than doubled in the last five years, to 6,740 MW, and the American Wind Energy Association, a national trade group, forecasts that wind may be producing as much as 6 percent of U.S. electricity output by 2020. (Wind already supplies more than 34,000 MW of generating capacity in the European Union.) Yet only two proposals for offshore wind farms -- one off the coast of Massachusetts and another off Long Island, New York -- are even under serious consideration. Proposals to tap wind power off the coast of New Jersey proved so controversial that in December 2004 acting governor Richard Codey pulled the plug on the project and imposed a 15-month moratorium on offshore wind development, setting up a commission to study the issue further.

Offshore wind farms have encountered fierce opposition from local residents who worry about damaged fishing grounds, dead seabirds, ruined ocean views, and declining property values. "Wind projects are running into difficulties throughout New England," says Pete Didisheim, advocacy director for the Natural Resources Council of Maine. "People assess them in terms of localized impacts, and have trouble looking at their broader energy and climate-change benefits." The

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#### Auction Madness

If you're looking for an accurate barometer of shifting public tastes, look no farther than eBay. In the words of Marc Smith, an analyst of market trends for Microsoft, "This



community is at the cutting edge of contemporary pop culture," with more people now watching the online auction site than any single TV show.

So what does pop culture have to say about the environment? To find out, we plugged some common environmental terms into the eBay search engine. It turns out that you can buy carbon-offset renewable-energy credits on eBay, as well as British chemical and biological warfare suits. You can buy fragments of unexploded nuclear bombs.

environmental impact of fossil fuels is hard to see, Didisheim says, whereas "wind farms are a big, tangible presence."

The most celebrated dispute has been over Cape Wind, a proposed 420-megawatt project in Nantucket Sound, five miles south of Cape Cod. A vocal opposition group, the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, claims support from local governments, an array of private organizations, and prominent elected officials including Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney and Senator Edward Kennedy. Cape Wind has countered with endorsements from citizens' groups, labor unions, and environmental organizations, while a 2004 draft assessment by the Army Corps of Engineers concluded that the project would improve regional air quality and would not interfere with recreational fishing or navigation. Yet the alliance has succeeded in prolonging the review process, a tactic that Cape Wind officials assert may cripple the project by scaring off investors.

Now imagine a wind farm with 40 turbines, each roughly 250 feet tall, covering eight square miles of ocean and fully visible from the south shore of Long Island, one of the most densely populated areas on the eastern seaboard. The stage might seem to have been set for a replay of the Cape Wind conflict. In fact, the opposite happened. On April 26, when the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) and a private developer, FPL Energy, made their joint application to build the Long Island Offshore Wind Park, they met with no significant opposition. Indeed, polls taken by local news organizations showed that more than 80 percent of respondents favored the project.

The key, says Ashok Gupta, director of the air and energy program at the Natural Resources Defense Council, was the proactive approach taken by local renewable-energy advocates. "It's important for proponents to engage with communities early," Gupta says, "before there's a lot of opposition." Even before a site had been selected, the Long Island Offshore Wind Initiative started to build support, organizing more than 70 public meetings to address residents' concerns. As a result, says Dan Zaweski, director of energy efficiency for LIPA, "The project is not a surprise to anyone. There has been a tremendous grassroots effort to get the word out."

This cooperative spirit has been a good thing, especially since many Long Island residents still have bitter memories of battles in the 1980s and 1990s over the Shoreham nuclear power plant, which was built over heated opposition. Shoreham never went into operation, but its massive cost overruns left Long Island with electricity rates that were among the highest in the nation, although LIPA has recently brought them under control. To avoid a repeat of this scenario, FPL Energy will build the offshore turbines and sell electricity to LIPA under a 20-year power purchase agreement, meaning that FPL will bear the financial risks of the project.

Support from elected officials was also important: New York governor George Pataki has strongly endorsed renewable energy development through measures that require 25 percent of all electricity delivered in-state to come from renewable sources by 2013.

Corporations get into the act with endangered species beer steins from Budweiser, endangered species glasses from Burger Chef, and McDonald's Ecology Action Pack (though admittedly that one appears to be an antique from the 1970s).

Green-themed makeup abounds, with products such as Mary Kay's Signature Rainforest Eye Color. The Bush administration will be gratified to learn that there are Clear Skies bath bubbles and shower gel. Or if you feel like indulging your inner Goth, you might try the series of eye shadows -- including Hazmat, Smog, and Oil Slick -- from a company called Urban Decay.

The music business, meanwhile, positively overflows with environmental allusions. There are CDs from bands like Acid Rain, Ecologist, Endangered Species, and Ozone Layer, not to mention a dance album by El Niño called *Live Global Warming*. Rap, not to be outdone, weighs in with D. J. Soul Slinger's *Ecosystem*, while heavy metal, perhaps predictably, tends toward the apocalyptic: Megadeth offers *Countdown to Extinction*, while a band named Landfill offers the depressing thought that *Extinction Is Mandatory*.

Our favorites, however: Acid Rain Hot Sauce (\$6.00), Toxic Waste Sour Candy (\$1.99), and Hazmat



Glow-in-the-Dark Fun Party Lights (failed to meet

Approval of the Long Island wind farm is still far from assured -- the formal environmental assessment phase has only just begun. Regardless of the final outcome, the Long Island experience contains some important lessons. In leading European countries such as Germany and Denmark, public acceptance of offshore wind farms has gone hand in hand with strong governmental support for the technology. Advocates in the United States face the much tougher challenge of educating communities about the benefits of offshore wind power -- and doing so long before people see the turbine blades spinning in full view of their favorite beach.  
-- *Jennifer Weeks*

reserve).

So eBay has spoken: Who says environmental ideas aren't in the mainstream of popular culture?

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