

TIDAL POWER

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Tidal power is the only form of energy which derives directly from the relative motions of the Earth–Moon system, and to a lesser extent from the Earth–Sun system. Tidal forces produced by the Moon and Sun, in combination with Earth's rotation, are responsible for the generation of the tides.

Tidal energy is extracted from the relative motion of large bodies of water. Periodic changes of water levels, and associated tidal currents, are due to the gravitational attraction of the Sun and Moon. Magnitude of the tide at a location is the result of the changing positions of the Moon and Sun relative to the Earth, the effects of Earth rotation, and the local geography of the sea floor and coastlines.

Because the Earth's tides are ultimately due to gravitational interaction with the Moon and Sun and the Earth's rotation, tidal power is practically inexhaustible and classified as a renewable energy resource.

A tidal generator uses this phenomenon to generate electricity. Greater tidal variation or tidal current velocities can dramatically increase the potential for tidal electricity generation.

The movement of the tides causes a continual loss of mechanical energy in the Earth–Moon system due to pumping of water through the natural restrictions around coastlines, and consequent viscous dissipation at the seabed and in turbulence. This loss of energy has caused the rotation of the Earth to slow in the 4.5 billion years since formation. During the last 620 million years the period of rotation has increased from 21.9 hours to the 24 hours we see now; in this period the Earth has lost 17% of its rotational energy. While tidal power may take additional energy from the system, increasing the rate of slowdown, the effect would be noticeable over millions of years only, thus being negligible.

Tidal power, also called tidal energy, is a form of hydropower that converts the energy of tides into electricity or other useful forms of power. The first large-scale tidal power plant (the Rance Tidal Power Station) started operation in 1966.

Although not yet widely used, tidal power has potential for future electricity generation. Tides are more predictable than wind energy and solar power. Among sources of renewable energy, tidal power has traditionally suffered from relatively high cost and limited availability of sites with sufficiently high tidal ranges or flow velocities, thus constricting its total availability. However, many recent technological developments and improvements, both in design (e.g. dynamic tidal power, tidal lagoons) and turbine technology (e.g. new axial turbines, crossflow turbines), indicate that the total availability of tidal power may be much higher than previously assumed, and that economic and environmental costs may be brought down to competitive levels.

Historically, tide mills have been used, both in Europe and on the Atlantic coast of North America. The earliest occurrences date from the Middle Ages, or even from Roman times.

The largest tidal power station in the world (and the only one in Europe) is in the Rance estuary in northern France, near St. Malo. It was built in 1966.

A major drawback of tidal power stations is that they can only generate when the tide is flowing in or out - in other words, only for 10 hours each day. However, tides are totally predictable, so we can plan to have other power stations generating at those times when the tidal station is out of action.