

Marin Voice: Making informed energy choices

By Kate Sears and Ford Greene^[LSEP] Guest op-ed column

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RECENTLY, a card arrived in your mailbox jointly from Marin Clean Energy and PG&E.

That's right, from both. Don't throw it away.

This annual mailer is full of valuable information on the costs and sources of electricity that PG&E and MCE procure for customers.

Now that MCE and PG&E share the responsibility for providing electricity, knowing what our options are as consumers assumes greater importance. Whether you are an MCE customer, or opted out to stay with PG&E, these annual updates will help you make an ongoing and informed decision about the electricity you buy.

We urge you to read and study it.

As we watch the worsening effects of greenhouse gas emissions on climate change, the choices we make are increasingly important.

MCE is an effective alternative to our reliance on fossil fuels that drive climate change; it relies on renewable energy, something PG&E struggles to do. Climate change is the dramatic, irreversible survival condition of our time.

Our successful local response has become a state and national model of what we can do locally to make a difference in this global crisis.

The mailer identifies your choices and provides critical accurate information. There are three products to choose from: one from PG&E which consists of 19 percent renewable energy; and two from MCE — one with 53 percent renewable energy ("Light Green") and one with 100 percent renewable energy ("Deep Green").

The mailer presents three charts. One summarizes data from 2012 rates; another identifies the components of the "renewable portfolio mix" and the third presents in pounds the CO2 impact which each product generates.

Chart 1 compares average monthly residential rates and presents the components and total cost of the three electricity products: PG&E (\$102.26), MCE's Light Green (\$103.17) and MCE's Deep Green (\$108.25).

http://www.marinij.com/ci_23689441/marin-voice-making-informed-energy-choices

Upon review of these rates, you might say "I thought MCE was going to meet or beat PG&E's rates." While energy prices always fluctuate, especially in a more competitive market, Chart 2 responds to this legitimate concern by showing the 2012 sources of electrical power for each of the three products and the percentages of each type of energy included in each of the three product portfolios.

For less than a \$1 per month increase on average when compared to PG&E's product, MCE's Light Green offers almost 2.5 times more renewable energy and Deep Green offers more than five times more renewable energy. Is the 91 cents cost difference between MCE and PG&E worth the amount of renewable energy used?

That's your choice. The mailer helps you make it.

Chart 3 addresses the total CO2 emissions for each product on a mega-watt hour basis. PG&E generates 393 pounds; Light Green, 389 pounds and Deep Green, 0 pounds.

The discerning customer might say, "There's not much difference here between MCE and PG&E."

But there is. Note that PG&E relies on a 22 percent nuclear energy in its mix; nuclear generation gets greenhouse gas credit. But there is no nuclear-specific generated electricity in the MCE mix and thus no issue with the inability to safely dispose radioactive waste.

MCE remains competitive on price, exceeds PG&E on renewables and greenhouse gas emissions and generates no nuclear waste.

The percentage of renewable power in MCE's mix supports a market shift which enhances renewable energy generation reflected as growth in the renewable energy sector. MCE leads the state and the nation in effectively checking climate change at the local level.

The information in the mailer shows you why we think MCE is the superior choice. The energy you use is your choice to make. We hope this has helped you do that.

Marin County Supervisor Kate Sears of Sausalito and San Anselmo Town Councilman Ford Greene are members of the Marin Energy Authority board.