Director's Message
October 16, 2009

We have submitted our chapter application as the Tennessee Chapter to ASES and await any changes to the package in anticipation of their meeting on November 7. Hopefully, on that date, we can be officially designated a chapter of ASES. The next project is to complete our 501c3 tax exempt application to the IRS.

Update: Here is our amended charter (pdf).

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The Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUCT) recently issued an order denying a complaint by the JD Wind Companies and interpreting the Public Utilities Regulatory Policies Act of 1978 (PURPA) to prohibit wind and solar-powered qualifying facilities (QFs) from selling output under contracts with rates based on avoided costs. The PUCT held that under PURPA, wind-powered QFs are prohibited from establishing such contracts—and secure rates based on avoided costs—because wind generation is an intermittent resource, and therefore cannot provide "firm power." The PUCT's prohibition of QF sales apparently would apply equally to wind, solar and all other intermittent renewable power generating facilities. (article, pdf)

This is a sign for the future growth of solar PV. The issue of intermittent power sources to a utility means that the utility must accept the sporadic output from a solar installation and somehow compensate the spurious nature of the source with buffering of some sort. If our electric utilities want solar to be a dispatchable power source, then energy storage must come into the picture. Just where should the energy storage be located is the issue. Should the utility be required to accept the solar as is? If so, then the utility will be the entity to install energy storage at its distribution centers.

Someone will have to pay for that energy storage. Just who should pay is a question that needs exploring. The alternative is to require major solar installations, say over 100 kW peak, to require on-site energy storage. The energy storage at the installation site can buffer the power delivered to the utility and thereby save the utility the cost of a larger energy storage at the distribution stations. Also, the energy storage at the supplier end can be rented by the utility to store power produced at night and then used during peak hours of the day. This to me is the better scenario. The cost of a lead-acid battery storage facility for holding 1 megawatt-hour is roughly $250,000 to $500,000 depending on the how the battery power is stored and delivered as well as the life of the battery

before it requires replacement. When improved lithium or other types of batteries come into practical use, then these batteries can replace what exists today. Until then, we have to use what is economical and available.

–Steve Levy