

## Sunny outlook at Ashburnham utility

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ASHBURNHAM -- Nonprofit community-owned electric utilities across the country have spent the last week celebrating Public Power Week in recognition of the services provided by municipal light departments.

The Ashburnham Municipal Light Plant has been no exception.

"Public Power Week gives us the chance to emphasize the advantages of locally grown, locally owned power to our citizens," said AMLP General Manager Mike Rivers.

In Ashburnham, packs of electrical switch and outlet insulators were distributed for free to ratepayers.

The Ashburnham Municipal Light Plant passed the week fairly quietly, even though it probably does have a few things to brag about.

"We actually currently have just about the largest percentage of solar usage of any utility in the country," said Rivers.

Based on peak energy output levels gathered by the regional nonprofit energy company ISO New England, Ashburnham's electricity needs are covered by a higher percentage of solar energy than most other communities nationwide.

According to Rivers, the level ISO New England uses in comparing Ashburnham to other communities shows that up to 49 percent of the town's electricity comes from solar energy. However, these levels are usually checked later in the day, when solar energy is less productive. In the middle of a day with clear, sunny skies, as much as 99 percent of Ashburnham's electricity is coming from solar panels.

As a result of this, ratepayers are only faced with a charge of 15 cents per kilowatt hours compared to the traditionally higher prices charged by National Grid and Unitil.

Solar power hasn't been the only alternative energy resource explored by the AMLP. Hydroelectric and wind power have also been continually utilized, with Ashburnham being one of the 14 communities taking part in the Berkshire Wind Power Co-op.

"It's probably the best performing wind farm in Massachusetts," Rivers said of the co-op. "You might even be able to make the argument that it's the best in New England."

Compared to other states, Massachusetts has an above average number of community-owned utilities with a total of 41. The AMLP can trace its origins all the way back to 1908. Originally the privately owned Greene Electric Company, the business failed and was bought by the town. It had been community-owned ever since.

Public Power Week is an annual national event coordinated by the American Public Power Association. The association represents public electric utilities in nearly 2,000 communities serving 48 million Americans.

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