

INTRODUCTION TO ENERGY

Information from NEED Project 2008 (Energy Infobook)

WHAT IS ENERGY?

Energy makes change; it does things for us. It moves cars along the road and boats over the water. It bakes a cake in the oven and keeps ice frozen in the freezer. It plays our favorite songs on the radio and lights our homes. Energy makes our bodies grow and allows our minds to think. Scientists define **energy** as the ability to do work.

FORMS OF ENERGY

Energy is found in different forms, such as light, heat, sound, and motion. There are many forms of energy, but they can all be put into two categories: **kinetic** and **potential**.

KINETIC ENERGY

Kinetic energy is motion; it is the motion of waves, electrons, atoms, molecules, substances, and objects.

Electrical Energy is the movement of electrons. Everything is made of tiny particles called atoms. Atoms are made of even smaller particles called electrons, protons, and neutrons. Applying a force can make some of the electrons move. Electric current occurs when electrons move through a wire. Electric current is measured in amperes. Lightning is another example of electrical energy.

Radiant Energy is electromagnetic energy that travels in transverse waves. Radiant energy includes visible light, x-rays, gamma rays, and radio waves. Light is one type of radiant energy. Solar energy is an example of radiant energy.

Thermal Energy is the internal energy in substances; it is the vibration and movement of the atoms and molecules within substances. The more thermal energy in a substance, the faster the atoms and molecules vibrate and move. Geothermal energy is an example of thermal energy.

Sound is the movement of energy through substances in longitudinal (compression/ rarefaction) waves. Sound is produced when a force causes an object or substance to vibrate; the energy is transferred through the substance in a longitudinal wave.



Motion is the movement of objects and substances from one place to another. Objects and substances move when a force is applied according to Newton's Laws of Motion. Wind is an example of motion energy.

POTENTIAL ENERGY

Potential energy is stored energy and the energy of position, or gravitational energy. There are several forms of potential energy.

Chemical Energy is energy stored in the bonds of atoms and molecules. It is the energy that holds these particles together. Biomass, petroleum, natural gas, and propane are examples of stored chemical energy.

Stored Mechanical Energy is energy stored in objects by the application of a force. Compressed springs and stretched rubber bands are examples of stored mechanical energy.

Energy for Educators

Bringing Energy to the Classroom

INTRODUCTION TO ENERGY

Information from NEED Project 2008 (Energy Infobook)

Nuclear Energy is energy stored in the nucleus of an atom; it is the energy that holds the nucleus together. The energy can be released when the nuclei are combined or split apart. Nuclear power plants split the nuclei of uranium atoms in a process called **fission**. The sun combines the nuclei of hydrogen atoms in a process called **fusion**.

Gravitational Energy is the energy of position or place. A rock resting at the top of a hill contains gravitational potential energy. Hydropower, such as water in a reservoir behind a dam, is an example of gravitational potential energy.

CONSERVATION OF ENERGY

To scientists, **conservation of energy** is not saving energy. The law of conservation of energy says that energy is neither created nor destroyed. When we use energy, it doesn't disappear. We change it from one form of energy into another.

A car engine burns gasoline, converting the chemical energy in gasoline into mechanical energy. Solar cells change radiant energy into electrical energy. Energy changes form, but the total amount of energy in the universe stays the same.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Energy efficiency is the amount of useful energy you get from a system. A perfect energy-efficient machine would change all the energy put in it into useful work—a technological impossibility today. Converting one form of energy into another form always involves a loss of usable energy.

SOURCES OF ENERGY

We use many different energy sources to do work for us. They are classified into two groups—**renewable** and **nonrenewable**.

In the United States, most of our energy comes from nonrenewable energy sources. Coal, petroleum, natural gas, propane, and uranium are nonrenewable energy sources. They are used to make electricity, heat our homes, move our cars, and manufacture all kinds of products. These energy sources are called **nonrenewable** because their supplies are limited. Petroleum, for example, was formed millions of years ago from the remains of ancient sea plants and animals. We can't make more crude oil deposits in a short time.

Renewable energy sources include biomass, geothermal energy, hydropower, solar energy, and wind energy. They are called **renewable** because they are replenished in a short time. Day after day, the sun shines, the wind blows, and the rivers flow.

We use renewable energy sources mainly to make electricity.



ELECTRICITY

Electricity is different from the other energy sources because it is a **secondary** source of energy. We must use another energy source to produce electricity. In the U.S., coal is the number one energy source used for generating electricity.

Electricity is sometimes called an **energy carrier** because it is an efficient and safe way to move energy from one place to another, and it can be used for so many tasks. As we use more technology, the demand for electricity grows.

Energy for Educators

Bringing Energy to the Classroom