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82% of Americans Support Locally Sited Wind: Survey

An impressive 82% of Americans support wind farm projects in their hometown, up from 76% a year ago, according to a recent survey.

The 2009 Saint Index is the fourth such survey from the Saint Consulting Group and involved interviews with 1,000 adults nationwide.

Broken down by region, residents in the Midwest showed the greatest support for wind power in their community, at 86%. The South came in at 82% support, followed by the Mid-Atlantic (81%), the West (80%), and the Northeast (77%).

By comparison, only 43% of respondents said they support other types of local power projects. Still, opposition is down—and support up—for all types of power plant projects, the 2009 results show. A year ago only 38% expressed support for local power projects, and in 2006 that number was only 26%, suggesting a trend that perhaps reflects an increased awareness of the nation's significant energy needs and the concept of energy independence.

“I do think the renewable energy interests, particularly wind, have done a very good job linking the key national issues of importance—jobs and the economy, energy independence, climate change—to their developments and educating the public and Capitol Hill,” Ben Kelahan, senior vice president for energy at the Saint Consulting Group, told Wind Energy Weekly.

However, Kelahan also pointed out that in spite of the survey's effort to address the “not-in-my-backyard” issue by asking about locally sited projects, survey respondents nevertheless tend to answer more favorably than they might if a project were actually being proposed in their community. “Sometimes there can be a disconnect between the results on this kind of survey” and real-life situations when developers propose projects in communities, he said. For that reason, it remains crucial to invest in strong education efforts at the local level when projects are proposed, said Kelahan.

The lowest level of support by age group for wind power is among those over 65 (74% support ; 19% oppose). All other age groups are within 81-84% support. A full 79% Americans do not believe a large wind farm project is detrimental to their health and welfare, according to the index.