

LISTEN UP, ONTARIO...



The Green Energy Revolution is Here



QUICK TAKE

■ Bill 150 – Ontario's Green Energy Act – covers everything from toasters to electrical transmission. Too costly? Too challenging? Or just what the environment ordered?

Ready or not, the energy revolution is here—and all Ontarians should prepare now for a jolting journey into the wonderful world of GREEN. In February, the Ontario Government introduced Bill 150, the Green Energy Act 2009—legislation which, if passed, will create nothing short of a new culture of conservation.

For starters, tough energy efficiency standards would be required of household appliances and home water use. Energy efficiency would become a central tenet of the Building Code, and an energy audit would be mandated before the sale of any home.

To ensure that the public sector adopts energy conservation too, the bill includes a number of far-reaching provisions directed at governmental units and utility companies.

The legislation would streamline approvals for renewable energy projects and municipalities would lose most of their traditional planning controls (often used to protect residents and foster “not-in-my-backyard” decisions). Most importantly, local electricity distributors would be mandated to provide energy generators with “priority access” to connect to the electricity grid—and those generators would receive rebates for energy put back into the grid.

For example: the current proposed feed-in tariff price for a small rooftop generator is about eighty cents per kilowatt hour. If a homeowner now pays six cents to its electricity supplier, but could receive 80 cents with a small generator unit, the incentive to install a renewable energy-generating unit and attach to the grid would be significant.

As to how the government will administer this bold new venture and deal with the sweeping changes proposed, the legislation creates a Renewable Energy Facilitation Office, headed by a facilitator.

Among the challenges to the Ontario electricity system, local electricity distribution companies would be required to upgrade their lines and infrastructure to accommodate two-way energy transmission demands. Smart meters would be needed so that utilization and feed-in payments can be correctly calculated. To accomplish this, a healthy dose of capital funding will be needed.

Add to that, the challenges to other affected parties. For example, municipalities will need to gear up in order to meet the demands of building code compliance and what is certain to be an increase in nuisance complaints. Home buyers, real estate agents, planners, lawyers, lenders, and accountants will have to study up quickly to factor energy audits and grid-connection agreements into their transactions.

It's certain that thousands of jobs will be created, in both the private and public sector. Schools will introduce courses in energy, and energy auditing could be the new growth industry. To no one's surprise, taxpayers and energy rate-payers will supply most of the funding needed for the green initiative—whether through income taxes, sales tax, or increased energy charges. But the proposed legislation does address sheltering low-income earners from the full impact.

What is it worth to become a green leader? In a world where pollution, climate change, and social responsibility are critical considerations, many will conclude whatever the cost, we must act now.

In the meantime, Bill 150 is a hot topic. Look for lots of energy to be spent working out the details while balancing the multiple interests of those involved. That's all of us.

