

Hydro Energy

Hydroelectricity is the term referring to electricity generated by hydropower; the production of electrical power through the use of the gravitational force of falling or flowing water. It is the most widely used form of renewable energy, accounting for 16 percent of global electricity generation – 3,427 terawatt-hours of electricity production in 2010,^[1] and is expected to increase about 3.1% each year for the next 25 years.

Hydropower is produced in 150 countries, with the Asia-Pacific region generating 32 percent of global hydropower in 2010. China is the largest hydroelectricity producer, with 721 terawatt-hours of production in 2010, representing around 17 percent of domestic electricity use. There are now three hydroelectricity plants larger than 10 GW: the Three Gorges Dam in China, Itaipu Dam across the Brazil/Paraguay border, and Guri Dam in Venezuela.^[1]

The cost of hydroelectricity is relatively low, making it a competitive source of renewable electricity. The average cost of electricity from a hydro plant larger than 10 megawatts is 3 to 5 U.S. cents per kilowatt-hour.^[1] Hydro is also a flexible source of electricity since plants can be ramped up and down very quickly to adapt to changing energy demands. However, damming interrupts the flow of rivers and can harm local ecosystems, and building large dams and reservoirs often involves displacing people and wildlife.^[1] Once a hydroelectric complex is constructed, the project produces no direct waste, and has a considerably lower output level of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (CO₂) than fossil fuel powered energy plants.