Solar and Renewables

We often get asked when we're moving to solar power or why we insist on using a big smelly noisy generator when the sun is free, etc. etc.

Unfortunately right now there is very little solar equipment available to rent, and what is available to rent, would be far away. For the amount of power we use, it might take an extra truck from, say, Los Angeles, to bring in all that equipment. That truck alone would consume more fuel than we expect to consume with our generator over the course of a week. That doesn't help the environment. And buying new solar equipment just to use for one week a year would be both insanely expensive and equally bad for our carbon impact. The heavy batteries we would need to store power during the day and make it available at night only have a ten year lifespan and using them for 10 weeks total before sending them to a landfill is an environmental disaster.

Although the Burning Man organization has been encouraging camps to try small solar projects and thus incrementally move over, the truth is once we have a big generator in place, it is almost free to add a little bit more load to that generator, both from a carbon emissions perspective and from a financial perspective. For example, we considered investing in solar panels for the roof of our kitchen trailer, but whatever we spent on that, the net result would be just reducing the load on our generator by a tiny fraction and saving a few dollars in diesel fuel, while the cost and effort of getting those solar panels would be significant.

In short, solar power is great if you can use the panels, batteries, and inverters year-round, say, at your house in Las Vegas, but not so great in the remote playa conditions where it continues to be very very carbon-efficient to use diesel fuel. If you are tempted to spend money on solar infrastructure that will only get used once a year at Burning Man, it would be far far better for the environment to use that money for solar infrastructure in houses and permanent locations where it can work all 52 weeks a year. As we continue to grow our HUB on playa to include more and more camps, who all benefit from a single large efficient generator, we are actually reducing emissions and noise on playa, but we do not believe that the technology is there yet to minimize carbon emissions through solar at Burning Man. That said, we recognize that many small camps with low power needs can make solar work for them, we applaud camps that are experimenting with this technology and figuring out ways to make it work, and we'll jump on the bandwagon as soon as it is carbon-effective.

Revision #4
Created 2024-09-08 23:21:37 UTC by Jetpack
Updated 2024-09-09 06:42:07 UTC by Jetpack