Renewable Energy Interconnection

Standard interconnection rules establish clear uniform procedures and technical requirements that apply to utilities within a state to connecting distributed generation systems to the grid.

Federal law requires utility companies to allow interconnection between a wind turbine, solar array or other renewable energy generation source and the distribution and transmission lines owned by the utility company. The Iowa Utilities Board has approved standard interconnections that must be used by the investor-owned utilities (IOU) - MidAmerican Energy and Alliant Energy (Interstate Power and Light). The rural electric cooperatives and municipals can choose to follow those standard interconnection rules; however, they are not required to follow the interconnection standards. Iowa law allows for small wind innovation zones that include a standard interconnection.

Small Wind Innovation Zones

The Iowa Utilities Board will certify a government jurisdiction as a small wind innovation zone if

1. the jurisdiction has streamlined application and permitting for small wind turbines, consistent and appropriate zoning standards and expedited local approval processes;
2. the utilities in the jurisdiction have standard interconnection agreements that allow connecting the turbine to the utility’s distribution or transmission lines;
3. the turbine is 100 kilowatts or less in capacity;
4. The jurisdiction is a city, county, township, school district, community college, area education agency or Regents College or institution. It also includes local commissions, associations or tribal council encompassed within a local government if it adopts a model ordinance.

Policy recommendations

The Iowa Chapter:

1. Encourages counties and cities to develop streamlined processes for approving wind and solar distributed generation projects and to become a Small Wind Innovation Zone.
2. Supports standard interconnection rules that apply to all utilities in Iowa, including rural electric cooperatives and municals.
3. Supports feed-in tariffs which are long-term contracts between the owner of a wind turbine or solar panels and the utility company, specifying how much money per kilowatt hour the utility pays for a set period of time (usually years) for the purchase of the renewable energy and paying the producers a fair price for their energy.
4. Supports the use of homeowner or business owner liability insurance coverage for the renewable energy generation equipment and the elimination of prohibitively expensive liability insurance requirements such as the $1 million dollar coverage requirements of some utility companies.
5. Supports the Iowa Utilities Board having an ombudsman whose responsibility includes interceding when consumers want to install distributed generation and their utility company is impeding the installation.

Sources

Iowa Code § 476.48
199 Iowa Administrative Code 15.22

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1 As of December, 2018, three counties were designated as small wind innovation zones – Floyd, Johnson, and Linn.
2 The model ordinance is available from the Iowa Utilities Board and can be found at https://iub.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2019/01/2018_small_wind_innovation_zones.pdf