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## Geothermal



## Geothermal Energy Basics

Geothermal energy is the heat from the Earth. It's clean and sustainable. Reservoirs of geothermal energy range from the shallow ground to hot water and hot rock a few miles beneath the Earth's surface, and down even deeper to the extreme temperatures of molten rock called magma.

Almost everywhere, the shallow ground or upper 10 feet of the Earth's surface maintains a nearly constant temperature between 50° and 60°F (10° and 16°C). Geothermal heat pumps can tap into this resource to heat and cool buildings. A geothermal heat pump system consists of a heat pump, an air delivery system (ductwork), and a heat exchanger—a system of pipes buried in the shallow ground near the building. In the winter, the heat pump removes heat from the heat exchanger and pumps it into the indoor air delivery system. In the summer, the process is reversed, and the heat pump moves heat from the indoor air into the exchanger. The heat removed from the indoor air during the summer can also be used to provide a free source of hot water.

In the United States, most geothermal reservoirs of hot water are located in the western states, Alaska, and Hawaii. Wells can be drilled into underground reservoirs for the generation of electricity. Some geothermal power plants use the steam from a reservoir to power a turbine/generator, while others use the hot water to boil a working fluid that vaporizes and then turns a turbine. Hot water near the surface of the Earth can be used directly for heat. Direct-use applications include heating buildings, growing plants in greenhouses, drying crops, heating water at fish farms, and several industrial processes such as pasteurizing milk.

Hot dry rock resources occur at depths of 3 to 5 miles everywhere beneath the Earth's surface and at lesser depths in certain areas. Access to these resources involves injecting cold water down one well, circulating it through hot fractured rock, and drawing off the heated water from another well. Currently, there are no commercial applications of this technology. Existing technology also does not yet allow recovery of heat directly from magma, the very deep and most powerful resource of geothermal energy.

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