

Harbec uses gas to make its own electricity

[By Todd Grady](#)

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(Tuesday, July 31, 2001) -- One company in Ontario, Wayne County, isn't taking any chances that a power shortage could one day interrupt production.

Harbec Plastics Inc. built its own natural-gas-fired power plant and on July 9 became the first company known to Rochester Gas and Electric Corp. to go off line from the utility's electricity system. The plant can supply up to 750 kilowatts per hour of electricity to the 40,000-square-foot site, said Harbec owner Bob Bechtold.

It's only coincidence that Harbec completed a power plant at the same time the future of the nation's energy supply is being questioned. The \$2.4 million power plant has been under way for more than a year.

"If we start getting brownouts in New York state, you're going to start seeing stuff like this springing up all over," said Harold VanBortle, a Harbec maintenance technician who helped build the plant.

For example, there is interest in building a small power plant at Rochester Technology Park in Gates. The plant would be a "cogeneration facility" similar to Harbec's.

Cogeneration reuses waste generated by the production of electricity to make the system more efficient.

Some area school districts use cogeneration. Eastman Kodak Co. produces some of its own electricity at Kodak Park. And Genesee County Nursing Home in Batavia has its own power plant.

But businesses that produce their own power are still a rare phenomenon.

"It's reasonable to think we might see more of it as time goes on," said RG&E spokesman Mike Power.

Harbec was paying about \$20,000 a month in electricity costs for the 100-employee plant.

Bechtold estimates that the company can recoup the costs of building the power plant in eight to 10 years -- with electricity savings alone. The plant will realize additional savings on heat and air conditioning, which are powered at no extra cost.

"The move to off line isn't really what we were setting out to do," said Bechtold, an energy conservation enthusiast. "We were setting out to have more efficient and more reliable power."



AIMEE K. WILES

Bob Bechtold, president of Harbec Plastics Inc., shows his company's just-started cogeneration power plant in Ontario, Wayne County.

The company -- which has about \$10 million in sales annually -- was planning on staying connected to RG&E's grid as a back-up power source.

But the state Public Service Commission is expected to approve a standby tariff allowing utilities to charge a monthly fee for those customers that remain connected.

Bechtold said he'll have no choice but to disconnect Harbec once the charge starts. He estimates the new charge would negate his savings.

RG&E's Power said the amount of the new charge hasn't been set, but that companies that choose to stay connected should be obliged to contribute to the cost of emergencies and maintenance of the system.

"In a perfect world I would like to stay on the grid," Bechtold said. "But I can't. I see it as a penalty. They see it as a necessity."

Bechtold plans to buy a back-up generator to ensure Harbec has power in case something goes wrong with the plant.

Bechtold also plans to erect a 250-kilowatt wind generator in front of his business. The wind generator would reduce the amount of natural gas needed for the plant.

The plan was recently approved by the town of Ontario's planning board.

On the Web: <http://www.harbec.com/>.

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