

February 28, 2010

Stan Comeau (KONP),

Being in the communications business, you know the power of mention. Your “top billing” of Power Trip Energy Corporation at this year’s home show sends a powerful message to two demographics:

The General Public: Solar power is available only from Power Trip Energy Corp and in only one way – Grid-Tied.

The Solar Energy Industry: Solar power is available only from Power Trip Energy Corp and the rest of the providers, installers, retailers, contractors, and developers do not matter.

I am writing now on behalf of myself and Olympic Energy Systems, Inc. (the company I founded in April 2001), and to be clear, not in any way on behalf of Solar Motive (“our” local solar retailer founded almost 10 years ago). As you know, I exhibited last year and this year used my OES exhibitor slot to exhibit an associate (and procurement agent) of mine, Solar Motive.

This memo is for information only, so please do not take it as a criticism of your station or home show or the integrity, good name, or character of any of your employees.

I must have been sleeping or simply inattentive at the time of signing up for this year’s home show (again, albeit in association with Solar Motive), because I did not know that “Speaking Parts” (i.e., Talks and/or Workshops) were available. After all, the presentation area (on the Mezzanine) was previously used for exhibiting booths.

As a client advocate firm, I am sensitive to events that do not serve the true interests of people and of the industries, like renewable energy, that serve them. And your show this year falls into that category.

If there was discrimination on the part of the show (in providing speaking opportunities to Power Trip and not others in the same industry), then it was done so unwittingly.

Manipulating the public, and public institutions, and public-oriented events into unwittingly serving the interests of Power Trip, to the exclusion of the public and industry at large, is what Power Trip’s Andy Cochrane and Jeff Randall do and have done for years...an indication of just how vulnerable people and public entities are when business and corporate interests cloaked in a veil of public good, like fighting global warming or saving the planet.

The list of unwitting (and not so unwitting) victims of the Power Trip manipulation (what I have called Power Tricks) is extensive and goes back to at least 2003....

General Public
Solar Washington
American Solar Energy Society
Eco-Building Guild
Jefferson County Economic Development Council
Clallam County PUD
The Port Townsend Leader (Newspaper)

Power Trip found a willing partner in 2008 when the NPBA outright excluded Olympic Energy Systems from exhibiting at the Home Remodel Show & Energy Expo in Sequim. Remember, Olympic Energy Systems was an originating sponsor and organizer of the Olympic Energy Expos of 2001 – 2003. The exclusion was easy, after all, because Power Trip’s marketing brochure for the previous 3 years had highlighted a notable NPBA member (Zenovic) with an installed Solar PV system.

I literally had to push my way into the 2009 Remodel Show, at which I exhibited. What would be the value of a home show and energy expo that excludes an established renewable energy company (Olympic Energy Systems) doing client advocacy in favor of including a self-interested company (Power Trip) essentially offering only one solution to our energy woes...the solution with the most profit, least environmental benefit, and highest economic cost, especially opportunity cost?

Because of Power Trip, we do not have a local chapter of Solar Washington (a state chapter of ASES and a not for profit educational organization). I moved back to Washington State in 2001 to develop a local chapter alongside my new firm. So, instead of a broad, unbiased informing of energy options for the public, we get a corporate view dominated by Power Trip.

Power Trip’s Andy Cochrane was the local National Solar Tour coordinator from 2003 – 2006. I was Jefferson County’s first in 2002, relinquishing the role in the hope that we get more appropriate volunteers to do the job. Mr. Cochrane used the coordinator position to funnel the public to his company site, contrary to the rules and guidelines of the tour (and prohibition against marketing). There should have been a local volunteer doing the coordination (it was that way when I coordinated in Texas years before), not a solar contracting company, as the tour was for the public and system owners to tell their story. By 2006, Power Trip was eyeing using the tour coordinator position to leverage a feature article in the newspaper about their business – by lying to the Leader to devise the “story” – the article had inaccurate information, no reference to the National Solar Tour, and made direct implications that Power Trip was hosting the tour (when it was really ASES). OES clients were listed as Power Trip tour sites, though no mention of Olympic Energy Systems was made whatsoever in the article. The article launched Power Trip into the Port Townsend and Jefferson County solar market, while pushing out Olympic Energy Systems and others. The paper never published corrections, as they had initially hid their culpability in the misprinting.

When a representative of Solar Washington asked me to coordinate the 2009 National Solar Tour in Jefferson County (as my reporting of the unethical conduct of Power Trip basically led to their prohibition from doing it again, at least with their association with or reference to the National Solar Tour). I obliged (as no local Solar Washington chapter volunteers existed). The Port Townsend Leader literally refused to print information about the National Solar Tour despite my timely press release...the 2010 tour participants in Port Townsend had zero attendees. Andy used to get hundreds of people at his business when he unethically published his site as the start of the tour (purely for prohibited marketing purposes).

Power Trip was on a years-long predatory quest to monopolize the solar energy industry on the Olympic Peninsula. Case in point, the 2009 Clallam County National Solar Tour was kicked off at the Sequim High School by the PUD...Power Trip was a featured speaker to a captive audience of over 50 people and was the only exhibitor – to the exclusion of other contractors never given the chance to exhibit - to exhibit at a public institution (high school) subject to non-discrimination rules. The PUD unwittingly hurt the rest of the fledgling solar energy industry.

The PUD tour starting point idea in 2009 was based on Power Trip's previous heists of the National Solar Tour in Jefferson County. Power Trip followed a familiar pattern. When caught or stopped in one place for unethical conduct, they merely move on to do it somewhere else. The PUD's staff has changed since early 2006, when I wrote the PUD to object to their giving referrals (for 3 years!) to Power Trip from people inquiring to the PUD about solar energy...there were no referrals to anybody else (on the PUD website). Power Trip had obviously manipulated the PUD to help in marketing the for-profit company.

It was my contact with ASES in 2008 that led to the banning of Power Trip from coordinating National Solar Tours in Jefferson County (or anywhere). So, in 2009, Power Trip merely went to the Clallam County PUD and manipulated them into violating the rules of the tour.

One of the most egregious examples of Power Trip dishonesty was the run up to the fall 2005 Solar Grid-Tie Workshop at WSU Extension in Port Hadlock., when Andy Cochrane manipulated a budding energy forum and misrepresented the forum as a local chapter of the non-profit Solar Washington in order to obtain funds for a workshop serving as a free marketing event for Power Trip, an event with access to privileged email lists that served to prop Power Trip up, while pushing the rest of the industry down by excluding the broader aspects of our growing energy woes. I hate to say, the those actions were essentially fraud. But, cloak it in good intentions and it's all ok, right?

I have not scratched the surface on the extent of the shenanigans and unethical conduct carried out by Power Trip. They have done a good job of polishing their image and making subtle manipulation an advanced art. They may have hired away my lead installer in 2007 (just after Power Trip hired the lawyer Jeff Randall), but they have

I am truly chagrined by this year's KONP Home Show. I had enjoyed coming here in past years, helping Structures To Go in their past exhibits, having my own booth last year, and in looking forward to this year's home show. It's genuine. It's fun. But, seeing the PDN article on the show and seeing the top billing given Power Trip, I began to relive the nightmare that IS the looking out for public interest, when so much of our American psyche is about individualism and so-called free-market competition. There is no other one less deserving of such billing than Power Trip. You have possibly given the local Port Angeles solar grid-tie market to Power Trip, undermining my years-long efforts to grow the industry and get contractors into solar. Do we others have something to say at these events? Are the full options being presented at the home show? Was top billing Power Trip to ostensibly bring more people to the show (by the newness of grid-tie, I guess) worth the loss to the rest of the industry and to the public, shorted in their access to the industry? No, the loss is indeed great.

Sincerely,

Jonathan A. Clemens, President
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