

Clean-tech investors, executives meet in Indian Wells

National policy needed, leaders say

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Coachella Valley economic and energy representatives hit the 7th annual Clean-Tech Investor Summit in Indian Wells today intent on making connections and looking at ways to translate national trends in the market into new green business and jobs for the region.

“What does clean tech mean for the valley?” mused Carolyn Stark, former director of the UC Riverside Palm Desert campus, who is continuing to work on economic development issues in the valley. “There are small companies we can nurture, companies engaged in assembly.”

The Coachella Valley Economic Partnership is a sponsor of the summit, which draws several hundred energy investors and executives to the Renaissance Esmeralda Resort & Spa for two days of high-level discussions on current trends in the clean tech field.

Renewable energy and clean tech are key parts of CVEP's economic blueprint for diversifying the region's economy.

Speakers at the summit today have included Cathy Zoi, U.S. assistant secretary for energy efficiency and renewable energy; Carl Pope, chairman of the Sierra Club and Jon Lauckner, vice president of GM.

The general message from speaker after speaker: Clean tech is set to transform all sectors of the American and world economies, driven in part by the public's increasingly insatiable demand for clean, green products – provided the industry can overcome the lack of a strong political consensus on creating a national energy policy.

“Clean tech has the potential to transform every major industry in coming years,” said Ira Ehrenpreis, summit chair. “Green and clean have saturated our public consciousness. Interest in being green transcends politics. We all want clean, secure, affordable energy solutions.”

But Zoi said "The debate is going to swing on what the business community does. There are a whole lot of people (in Washington) who want tomorrow to be like yesterday."

Despite the national focus, Vincent Battaglia of Renova Energy in Palm Desert found strong interest in the valley's emerging energy sector.

"I'm finding the guys sitting around me are interested in how Renova is operating; they're very impressed," he said.

Battaglia was also picking up advance word on emerging technologies in the solar field – such as new carbon-based technology for solar panels coming in the next few months.

"This is going to be great for us; carbon is much less resistant to heat," he said.