



Clean tech summit set for Indian Wells

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The Coachella Valley Economic Partnership will promote the region's solar, wind and other renewable energy resources at a key gathering of cutting-edge green tech firms, venture capitalists and other energy industry leaders to be held Jan. 19-20 in Indian Wells.

CVEP is a sponsor of the seventh annual Clean Tech Investor Summit, which is expected to draw about 500 top-level energy investors and executives to the Renaissance Esmeralda Resort & Spa for two days of panels and speakers focusing on emerging trends in the industry.

“The exposure to investors nationwide is phenomenal,” said Vincent Battaglia, CEO of Renova Energy Corp., a solar firm in Palm Desert, who will use the CVEP sponsorship to sit in on some conference events.

“I think in our renewable industry, we are much more focused than we were before,” he said. “I’ll be asking questions on expected returns; I know what kind of fruits my (solar) energy bears.”

Wesley Ahlgren, CVEP's chief operating officer, also sees the summit as a high-level networking opportunity and a chance to showcase the valley's abundant renewable resources.

“We’ll be attending looking for the broader picture for investment opportunities,” he said. “We’re positioning ourselves as a renewable energy epicenter for the world.”

The conference has been held in the desert since its inception in 2005 and is now considered “a seminal event in the clean-tech sector,” said Ira Ehrenpreis, the summit's chairman and a general partner with Technology Partners, a Palo Alto venture capital firm.

“The attendees represent the who's-who of the clean-tech sector,” he said. “It’s not just a high-level conference; it’s a high-level event in terms of the interactions.”

Conference speakers this year include Cathy Zoi, U.S. assistant secretary for energy efficiency and renewable energy; Elon Musk, chairman and CEO of Tesla Motors; and Thomas Steyer, the Silicon Valley asset manager who partly funded and led the successful campaign against Proposition 23 in the November election.

If passed, Prop. 23 would have put an indefinite hold on California's aggressive climate change programs — a key driver for the clean-tech industry.

The defeat of the ballot initiative is one of many signals that make the coming year “a renaissance time for clean tech,” Ehrenpreis said.

“We have more interest from the public, from the corporations, the political arena and across the globe than we've ever had in history.”

Among the key trends he sees going forward are the emergence of multiple renewable energy centers, including the Coachella Valley, and an increasing focus on clean tech as one of the main economic drivers of the 21st century.

“Perhaps the most fundamental change we've seen in the sector is the human capital,” he said. “Today, the best and brightest are focused on clean tech as the next chapter of their lives.”

“This sector has gone from niche to mainstream.”

The stealth conference?

Although the Clean Tech Investor Summit has been held in the Coachella Valley since its inception in 2005, no one seems to know how or why it slipped under the radar of the region's broader business community.

One reason might be the high-level conference's equally high-level price tag. Registration for this year's two-day event Jan. 19-20 in Indian Wells is \$1,995. “It's one of those things,” said Wesley Ahlgren, chief operating officer of the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership, who first found out about the summit last year, “about a day before the thing happened.” Ahlgren resolved there and then not to miss out on the event again, resulting in this year's CVEP sponsorship, paid for with \$5,000 from the group's marketing budget.

Other summit sponsors include Wells Fargo, Ernst & Young, Goldman Sachs and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory.