
Department of Energy

Initiative Guides Hawaii to the Path of Energy Independence

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[Home](#) » Initiative Guides Hawaii to the Path of Energy Independence



The Hawaii Clean Energy Initiative's goal is to generate 70 percent of the state's power using clean energy such as wind. | Photo courtesy of the State of Hawaii.

With 90 percent of its energy coming from oil, Hawaii is the most oil-dependent state in the nation. The Hawaii Clean Energy Initiative is an ambitious plan to reverse that. A partnership between the state and the federal Department of Energy, the HCEI uses a

combination of increased energy efficiency and renewable energy sources to work toward the state's goal of meeting at least 70 percent of its energy needs from clean energy - 30 percent from efficiency and 40 percent from renewables - by 2030.

"What we're up to is, I think, one of the most daunting transformation projects in the state's history," says Ted Peck, the State of Hawaii's Energy Administrator. "We are attempting to totally shift our energy system to a clean energy system."

Launched in January of 2008, the HCEI has already helped spur the passage of multiple bills on clean energy. Among these include allowing utilities to base payments for renewable energy on factors other than the price of oil and another that sets incentives and penalties for Hawaiian utilities to reduce energy waste and increase renewable use. Other bills require solar water heaters in each new Hawaiian home and provide tax incentives for use of alternative fuels and renewable energy.

Transportation is a special energy challenge for Hawaii, where travel to and between the islands often requires airplanes. However, life on an island means shorter driving distances, Ted says, allowing the HCEI to explore all-electric vehicles. It also calls for increased use of alternative fuels, which will be aided by Recovery Act grants of over \$28 million for biofuel development in Hawaii. The money will fund a new biorefinery outside Honolulu as well as exploration of technologies that turn agricultural waste, algae and other biomass into "green" gasoline, diesel and jet fuel. The projects are expected to create 600 new jobs.

To meet the efficiency goals, Ted says the HCEI has focused on replacing conventional water heaters, which use about 30 percent of a home's energy, with solar. He says 25 percent of Hawaiian homes already have solar water heaters, and his office is considering how to penetrate "that last 75 percent."

Hawaii's abundant natural resources mean it has several renewable energy sources to choose from, including hydroelectric, geothermal, wind, solar, wave, ocean thermal and biomass. Many of these are already generating small amounts of the islands' electricity, but the HCEI is following up in a big way with the Interisland Wind and Cable Project. The project would put wind farms on Molokai and Lanai, where turbines would produce up to 400 megawatts of renewable energy - over 10 percent of the state's needs. The electricity would then be transferred via undersea cables to other islands. Ted estimates that if the project goes as planned, the wind farms could be in place by 2014.

Ted says the state plans to go beyond its stated goals. "We're not stopping at 70 percent and we're not waiting until 2030," he says. "If we deliver on the current commitments in the pipeline, which we are on track to do, we will cut our carbon dioxide emissions in half by 2020."

Editor's note: This story was updated on July 9, 2010 to correct the Recovery Act grant amount.

What does this mean for me?

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