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China To Focus on Renewable Energy

by By Kari Cameron, Voice of America
Hong Kong [RenewableEnergyWorld.com]

China is battling air pollution and high costs for imported energy with an aggressive focus on renewable energy. The Chinese government says it will have 100 gigawatts of wind-power capacity by 2020 — enough to power more than 60 million homes. That figure is more than three times the target the government laid out just 18 months ago.

Steve Lyons is the director of CWE Renewables, a wind energy company based in Hong Kong. His company is setting up wind farms in Inner Mongolia, funded mainly by Chinese investors. Despite the global economic crisis, the company has seen continued interest from investors and from provinces.

"There are provinces that have good wind resources, no wind capacity, and have asked us to help them put in place what needs to be put in place for a wind developer to come in," he said.

China's government has vowed to increase the use of alternatives to oil and coal for energy, such as wind, solar and nuclear power. The goal is to reduce the thick air pollution that blankets its cities and to reduce expensive imports of oil.

Companies from start-ups to well established businesses such as General Electric, see China's drive to clear the air as an opportunity. They are tapping the market hoping to capitalize on Beijing's push to for cleaner energy sources.

Renewable Energy Could Play Significant Role

Adrian Ho is the director of CWE Renewables. He thinks China's use of renewable energy will increase in coming years to play a significant role in meeting the nation's energy needs.

"There is a high chance that I believe China will go to 25 percent some day and that 25 percent will keep expanding," he said.

Today, renewable sources produce just eight percent of China's total energy. But Beijing aims to increase that to 15 percent by 2020. In comparison, the United States hopes to generate 10 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2012.

The roots of China's push for renewable energy are in a 2005 law that gives incentives such as fixed rate tariffs and carbon credits to renewable-energy companies. The law also makes clear that provinces are expected to meet new clean energy guidelines.

Chris Flavin is the president of the [Worldwatch Institute](#), a U.S. environmental group. He says the law works thanks to China's entrepreneurs and a government that is making the move to clean energy a priority.

"The Chinese government, I guess in part of the fact that it does not have some of the kind of democratic complexities that Western countries do, is able to do things quicker and without the kind of resistance from narrow economic interests that might make it more difficult," said Flavin.

China's Wind Energy Capacity Has Doubled

The World Wind Energy Association says China's wind energy capacity has doubled every year since the law was put in place, to 12 gigawatts. Wind is the fastest growing renewable energy in China, with 60 percent more capacity since 2005.

But pollution takes much longer to clean up than it does to create. China is failing to hit targets for bringing pollution and carbon emissions under control.

U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Rodham Clinton has said she will push developing nations such as China and India to commit to reducing carbon emissions as part of a new international treaty on fighting climate change. Emissions from fossil fuels, such as coal and oil, are thought to contribute to global warming.

Flavin says that it is not that China does not want to reduce emissions — the problem is their lack of a better option.

"The main driving force is that China is not rich in any fossil fuel except for coal and coal is a heck of a lousy way to fuel an economy," he said.

Stimulus Plan Is Helping

Things are changing. Wind and nuclear power are getting a boost from China's almost \$600 billion economic stimulus plan, which promises to help with grid infrastructure and nuclear development.

"If you look at where we are today and compare with what anybody might have expected or even hoped for five years ago, I think it's really extraordinarily encouraging what they've accomplished," Flavin added.

As China continues to build its renewable energy capacity, the world's most populous nation is emphasizing that clean energy is not a luxury but a necessity for its survival. Renewables will help reduce pollution in the long term, quelling Beijing's concerns about social unrest over pollution-related illness. China also needs clean energy to increase its role on the global stage - a lack of natural resources make clean energy the only possibility for China to achieve energy independence.

Kari Cameron is a writer for Voice of America.

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