

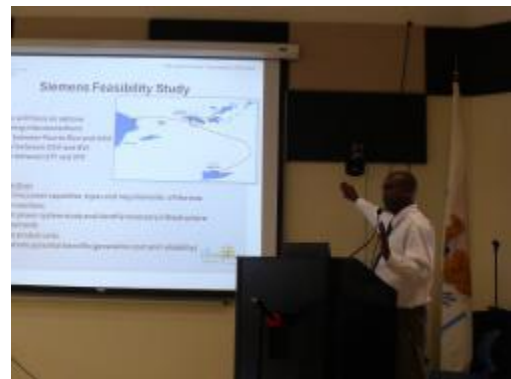
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Conference Reports Progress in Quest For Renewable Energy

[1]Reducing the territory's fossil fuel use will take a mix of strategies, bringing in new sources of power and increasing energy-efficiency measures, according to local and national experts speaking at Energy Development in Island Nations (EDIN) workshops on St. Croix this week.

EDIN is an international partnership focused on the unique power-generation problems and opportunities of island nations, which traditionally rely heavily on petroleum. In late 2009, the United States decided to make the U.S. Virgin Islands its EDIN pilot project, giving technical and some financial assistance to help form and carry out practical strategies to meet the goal of a 60-percent reduction in fossil fuel use by 2025 set in February by Gov. John deJongh Jr.



The Monday-Tuesday forum on St. Croix was the third in a series of energy workshops organized by EDIN since the EDIN-USVI project's official launch in February. Experts from the U.S. departments of Energy and Interior, DOE's National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), the V.I. Water and Power Authority, and the private sector reported on energy efficiency, transportation, renewable energy generation and other facets of the puzzle.

As the U.S. participant, the territory's efforts have been funded by \$31 million in federal economic stimulus money, which is more likely to flow if there are concrete results, according to NREL officials at the forum.

Some of that money will go to build wind-speed detectors to collect raw data needed to show lending institutions what sort of power specific wind projects will generate, and some will finance other research and development efforts, said Dan Olis, a senior engineer with NREL.

There were also presentations on wind and solar power, using trash for energy, sources of biofuels and the latest information on a study examining possible underwater cables connecting the territory to Puerto Rico.

The reports were not just general discussion of the merits of different strategies but rather progress reports on specific research aimed at implementing them in the territory. For instance, officials from Alpine Energy Group (AEG) gave an update on their plans to build a refuse-derived fuel (RDF) processing plant and a power plant on St. Croix to use it.

AEG had entered into an arrangement with the V.I. Water and Power Authority to build power plants in both districts using both RDF and petroleum coke. But environmental concerns and growing opposition in the community led to those plans being changed.

Now AEG plans to submit new permit applications by the end of November for scaled-back plans with no petroleum coke and only one power plant, AEG Project Finance Manager Sydney McConathy told the audience. The plant would be able to accommodate a variety of fuels, but without burning petroleum coke it will not require the same extent and kinds of pollution control devices, according to McConathy and other AEG officials at the forum.

Public hearings should start in February, and if all goes according to their vision, construction could begin sometime in March or April and the plant should be online before the end of 2013, she said.

The smaller, single St. Croix power plant would be capable of providing 16.5 megawatts of power. "That represents roughly 30 percent of the power needs for the island," McConathy said.

UVI students Renesha Henderson and Mpho Sello reported on a study they are conducting into fats, oils and greases in the territory and their preliminary work toward determining exactly how much edible oil is shipped to the territory, how much restaurants use, how much is hauled away for disposal, and other factors affecting its cost and usefulness as a fuel.

Paul Chakroff of the St. Croix Environmental Association shared early information on research into cultivating tan-tan and other crops as extra fuel for the AEG plant, providing data on the energy a hectare of various crops might produce.

All of these efforts will involve WAPA, which is also a major part of the USVI-EDIN partnership. WAPA Executive Director Hugo Hodge Jr. said the power and water utility "definitely supports integrating renewables into WAPA's generation mix," and having EDIN and the NREL providing technical expertise is hugely valuable.

Other local participants agreed the EDIN partnership and the week's meetings were valuable.

“It has been very substantive,” Chakroff said in a statement after the forum. “We have covered a broad spectrum of Energy issues and it tells me that progress is being made on energy issues here in the Virgin Islands.”

Bevan Smith Jr., director of the V.I. Energy Office, said “real progress was made toward our goals.”

EDIN and its USVI partners plan to hold similar forums about three times a year to confer and report back on the progress of its various working groups.

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