

REM 2010 Concludes, but the Work is Just Starting

Arthur O'Donnell

The exhibit booths are being dismantled and put inside crates and boxes for shipment home. The Renewable Energy Markets 2010 conference has concluded, and our temporary space in the Exhibit Hall of the DoubleTree Hotel is being turned over to tables and booths associated with the American Numismatic Association. Tradable RECs give way to collectible coins.

In the lobby, clusters of folks who just days ago were being introduced for the first time are now exchanging farewells and promises to send that report/analysis/photo to their new colleagues. The chat has turned from “What session are you going to next?” to “When are you heading home?” and “What are your plans for tonight?” The scheduled parties and side events are a fond memory, but a Portland weekend beckons.

By all accounts, this was another in the series of most successful REM programs, providing valuable information, beneficial networking opportunities and, well, a lot of fun in the process. From Solar Man to the God of Thunder, the Green Power Leadership Awards dinner brought market superheroes to light and gave recognition to dozens of companies, agencies and individuals who are making huge differences in bringing renewable energy into the mainstream.

This was certainly an eventful week overall. President Obama was also in town, just down the road at the Convention Center for a political rally, and his administration was well represented here by Beth Craig of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, staff of the EPA Green Power Partnership program, Linda Silverman from the U.S. Department of Energy, and other representatives of agencies and offices.

But REM 2010 was not just about federal government support for green power – in fact, the case could be made that the major theme of the week was about how despite the absence of federal climate change legislation or a national renewable mandate, these state, regional and voluntary markets for clean power keep growing and maturing. And about what needs to happen to keep that momentum and drive additional demand for renewable energy into the future.

The conference presentations are deep in case studies, best practices and new approaches to marketing renewable energy, effectively promoting it to customers and constituents, and all the policies that support or hinder those efforts.

I urge readers to visit the [REM website](#) to see photos, review the sponsorship list and agenda and click on any of the presentations now posted for posterity. That's one way to keep the conference spirit alive and growing until next year.

Another effort to carry on the energy level of REM 2010 was begun on Friday afternoon, when Center for Resource Solutions hosted the Renewable Energy Executive Summit, bringing together many of the brightest and most dedicated folks in this segment, along

with other invited guests, to work through the many issues facing voluntary markets. Our intent was to crystallize the debates over policy approaches and problems into a concrete set of solutions and strategies that will help drive demand for green power over the next several years.

You cannot solve all the problems in a three-hour working group, but the Summit was very effective in focusing on key issue areas and raising pieces for what could amount to a comprehensive plan of action that will add *at least* 10,000 MW of new renewable energy capacity devoted to voluntary purchase by 2015.

This goal can be expressed in several ways to make it more meaningful to the general public: doubling the current installed capacity, or raising voluntary purchases to 2% of the total retail electricity deliveries in the US. For now, we're calling it "The Two Percent Solution," and we hope it can be paired with a long-term continuation of CRS's ["Buy Clean Energy" campaign](#) so that consumers of all categories and locations can readily access clean power and make a commitment to join us.

I'm still sorting through all of the ideas and approaches raised during the Summit, but already a few disparate ideas in my mind are clinging to others to begin an agenda for action.

One of the immediate tasks will be to prepare for an expected avalanche of media and public interest in the newly proposed changes to the federal Trade Commission's "Green Guides" that will for the first time try to address accuracy in marketing claims for renewable energy products, RECs use, and carbon offsets – along with raising a flag of such issues as what exactly do consumers think when they hear the term "Made with renewable energy"? The FTC was unable to really grapple with the other highly used, if highly misunderstood concept of Sustainability, but we expect the Green Guides to foster that discussion as well. It's in everyone's interest to support the effort to articulate what constitutes a valid claim versus an unsupported "self-certification" in this marketplace.

CRS and the Green-e programs are preparing to host an informational webinar in the next few weeks to provide our assessment of how the proposed changes to the Guides may impact this marketplace. But in the meantime, we urge you to review the document for yourselves and consider entering comments by the December 10 deadline.

Another set of strategies to increase demand for green power goes to deepening and broadening electric utility company Green Pricing programs through a combination of regulatory goals and incentives. This could further blur the lines between voluntary and compliance markets, but it was clear from REM 2010 that those lines are already being smoothed over to a realization that what we have created is a multi-nodal market for renewable energy in which buyers and sellers have an increasing numbers of ways to transact, a plethora of market structures and myriad rules of the road.

There is much more to tell, but for now, I'll let the great memories of REM 2010 settle for a little bit while I pack my bags to head home and begin the next chapter.

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