

Green Energy Tour Comes To Columbus

A coalition of environmental and green energy businesses will hold a forum in Columbus this week as the legislature is mulling further changes to Ohio's renewable and energy efficiency law. Ohio's Energy Future Tour event in Columbus on Tuesday evening features some of the same speakers who lobbied against legislation passed last year (SB310, 130th General Assembly) that relaxed requirements for utilities to obtain 12.5% of their electricity from renewable sources while helping customers cut their usage 22% by 2027.

In addition to delaying the annual standards for two years, the bill also created the Energy Mandates Study Committee to consider further restrictions to the law. [Sen. Troy Balderson](#) (R-Zanesville), the panel's co-chairman, has said he intends to take a different tack than last year's contentious hearings and will seek input primarily from the utility industry and regulatory agencies. (See [Gongwer Ohio Report, January 20, 2015](#))

Jane Harf, spokeswoman of the [Energy Future Tour](#), said proponents of the clean energy standards want to make sure policymakers hear both sides of the debate.

"This is an opportunity for business and local organizations to come and tell their success stories as it relates to renewable and energy efficiency, and also for members of the community to ask questions and participate in that dialogue," she said in an interview. "We hope that legislators and their staff will attend."

Several witnesses that testified in opposition to Senate Bill 310 last year will take part in the Columbus forum, including: Eric Thumma and Dan Litchfield, of Iberdrola Renewables Inc.; Dennis Bollinger, of Energy Developments Inc.; and John Seryak, of Go Sustainable Energy LLC. Other participants represent IGS Energy, Columbus Public Health, the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission.

Ms. Harf said the coalition's goal is to look toward the future of green energy development in Ohio, rather than gripe about what happened in the legislature last session.

"We're not trying to re-litigate anything that happened in the past. We are non-partisan. We want these to be positive messages. We don't want to engage in blame or finger-pointing or any of those kind of negative enterprises that really don't advance the conversation," she said. The coalition initially launched the tour in Cleveland in December and planned for events in Columbus, Dayton and Toledo. However, Ms. Harf said forums were recently added in Cincinnati and Athens later this year because of the high level of interest.

"I have people registered for forums whose dates are not yet set and people asking to speak. So I think there's a real need out there for a venue like this, where the public and the business people, and the community leaders and non-profits and local governments to all come together and talk about this issue," she said.

After the tour winds down in June, organizers will draft a report with legislative recommendations, she said.

"I honestly don't know what the recommendations will say. We believe in renewable energy and energy efficiency, and to the extent that those standards can promote economic development, job creation, protect public health and the environment, that's important. So I think that's at the core of what we're talking about, but there's lots of other ideas out there," she said.

The coalition's recommendations will likely be released before the Energy Mandate Study Committee's final report, which is due Sept. 30.

- See more at: http://www.gongwer-oh.com/programming/news.cfm?article_ID=840260202#sthash.UXOEAKQH.dpuf