

[The Arizona Republic](#)

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SCOTTSDALE - If Arizona is to lead in the research and use of solar and other alternative sources of energy, a regional approach is needed, says an expert on sustainability.

Jonathan Fink, director of Arizona State University's Global Institute of Sustainability, said cities in the forefront of renewable energy include Portland, Ore., Seattle, Chicago, Austin, and Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

"In those places we have lots of cities just like we do in metro Phoenix and they tend to work together. Here in metro Phoenix, Scottsdale is competing with Tempe is competing with Phoenix who can be the greenest. We really have to get beyond that here because we have to be competing with these other regions of the country," he said. Fink was one of seven panelists who discussed clean, renewable energy and its environmental and economic impact on Arizona at a town hall sponsored by U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz.

It was standing room only at the forum held Monday at SkySong, ASU's Scottsdale Innovation Center. About 200 people weathered a cranky air conditioning system to learn what Arizona is doing to develop alternative energy sources.

They range from Arizona Public Service's solar power plant project called Solana, which eventually will serve 70,000 Arizona homes, to research by ASU on using sunshine-loving microorganisms to create bio fuels.

Mitchell said current energy policy has increased the country's dependence on Middle East oil, undermined national security and contributed to climate change.

"We must refocus our energy production on alternative sources of the sun and wind, especially in Arizona where we have plenty of both," Mitchell said.

Mitchell said Scottsdale Mayor Mary Manross and the city have shown terrific leadership when it comes to sustainability practices. Scottsdale adopted new building codes for more energy efficient residential and commercial construction. Its newest fire station, which opens in July in

downtown Scottsdale, will be fully LEED certified for its use of green building principles. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. The town hall was moderated by John D'Anna, senior editor of The Arizona Republic and author of the azgreenday blog on azcentral.com. D'Anna told the audience the newspaper recently hosted a group of journalists from Montenegro, a country in southeastern Europe. Looking out the 9th floor newsroom window over the Valley of the Sun, they wanted to know where all the solar panels were.

"One of the journalists even said 'you're wasting all this energy from the sun,' " D'Anna said.

Arizona Corporation Commissioner Kris Mayes credited public support and the commission's adoption in October 2006 of renewable energy standards for requiring utilities to develop alternative technologies.

The commission requires that regulated electric utilities must generate 15 percent of their energy from renewable resources by 2025.

Barry Broome, president and CEO of the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, said the solar and alternative technology movement will be an economic plus for the state. He noted there are 29 German-based companies looking to invest in Arizona's green technology potential.

"We're really thrilled and poised to lead the nation in this technology," Broome said.

Fink said countries like Germany and Japan, despite their share of cloudy days, lead the way in solar energy programs.

"It doesn't make a lot of sense if we just look at what has the most sunshine. We in Arizona really should logically be the heart of the solar industry for the world and, I think, that's what we all are trying to get to," Fink said.