

Clean-energy advocates want Ohio to alter course

Groups decry what they see as backtracking on environmental goals

By [Dan Gearino](#) The Columbus Dispatch • Thursday September 10, 2015 1:37 AM

Clean-energy advocates say Ohio has veered off course with recent legislation and needs to grab an opportunity this month to get back on track.

Ohio's Energy Future Tour, a coalition of business groups and environmental advocates, issued a report on Wednesday calling on the state to lift a "freeze" on benchmarks for renewable energy and energy efficiency, and to make other changes that embrace clean-energy technologies.

The report's authors are making their case to the public and the Energy Mandates Study Committee, a panel of the Ohio General Assembly, which has until the end of the month to issue recommendations following hearings on many of the same issues.

"As a state, we need to take seriously our responsibility to the environment and the community," said Greg Streenrod, vice president for business development for Gem Energy, a renewable-energy developer and consultant in Toledo. He spoke in a conference call with reporters.

The coalition sponsored public forums across the state, which largely consisted of testimony from people who disagree with recent energy legislation.

At the same time, the legislative study committee is run by majority Republicans who supported the legislation.

There are two laws at issue.

- First is Senate Bill 310, passed last year, which [placed a two-year freeze on state rules that require utilities to buy certain amounts of renewable energy and to meet targets for reducing energy use](#). The law has several other notable provisions, including a repeal of a rule that says utilities must buy half of their renewable energy from sources within the state.
- Second is a [change to rules addressing placement of wind-energy turbines](#), a modification that was inserted into a larger budget bill last year. The change puts more distance between turbines and nearby buildings, which has the effect of reducing the number of turbines that can be installed for some projects.

In response, the Energy Future Tour is asking lawmakers to reinstate the renewable-energy and energy-efficiency standards and repeal the new limits on wind-turbine placement. The group also says the state should comply with the federal Clean Power Plan to reduce carbon emissions rather than fight certain aspects of the plan, as is the case now.

“If Ohio is going to compete in a 21st-century economy, we need an energy policy that rewards innovation,” Jay Troger, CEO of Nextronex, a solar-energy component manufacturer in the Toledo area, said in a statement. “Other states, including some of our neighbors, are passing us by, but it’s not too late for Ohio to regain the lead.”

Sam Randazzo, a Columbus lawyer for industrial businesses and a supporter of last year’s legislation, says the report is making requests that would lead to an increase in utility bills. He says the authors are straining their credibility when they argue that renewable energy is affordable and good for the economy, and also argue that renewable-energy mandates are necessary.

“If it’s so cheap, why do you have to force people to buy it?” he asked.

The legislative committee will issue its recommendations, and then it will be up to the General Assembly to decide what to do next. If lawmakers take no action, the freeze would lift next year.

The committee is unlikely to ask for a complete repeal of the standards, said the panel’s co-chairman, Sen. Troy Balderson, R-Zanesville. Among the possible actions is reduction in the standards to make them easier for utilities to meet, he said.

He made the comments in July at the panel’s final public meeting and was not available for comment on Wednesday.

dgearino@dispatch.com

[@DanGearino](#)