



Clean Startups Score Funding

California Clean Tech Open winners announced in transportation, energy efficiency, solar power, and water.

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Five California cleantech startups won seed funding Tuesday as part of the inaugural California Clean Tech Open, a business competition with the largest prize in the United States.

The companies—KiteShip, Adura Technologies, GreenVolts, EDC Technologies, and Crystal Clear Technologies—each won \$50,000 in cash and more than \$50,000 in services, including one year of free legal and accounting services, public relations consulting, executive search services, and office space—bringing the total value of the prizes awarded to more than \$500,000.

The competition “is legitimizing this little area of cleantech as an investment category,” said Zach Gentry, CEO of Berkeley, California-based Adura Technologies.

It’s also good for the state and for the environment, he said. “Every light you turn off, it’s a pound of carbon dioxide, and if everyone does that, that’s power plants that don’t have to be built,” he said. “The value to California is large, and the value to individuals in the state is tremendous.”

The Winners

KiteShip, of Palo Alto, California, makes a wind power system for ships, reducing the cost of fuel—the No. 1 expense for ship owners. Ships use 10 percent of the world’s transportation fuel, but produce 50 times as much sulfur dioxide as all the other transportation combined because they use bottom-of-the-barrel bunker fuel, said KiteShip CEO Jeremy Walker.

KiteShip tethers large helium-filled sails to the ships, which use wind to reduce throttle—and energy costs—by 20 to 30 percent without reducing speed, Mr. Walker said. He added that 77 private sailboat customers are using KiteShip’s product now, and the company plans to launch its first commercial product next year.

Adura uses various sensors, wireless technology, and its software to turn off lights that are unnecessary or not being used. The company’s wireless sensor network could dramatically cut energy costs in commercial buildings without requiring the buildings to be rewired; a costly process, Mr. Gentry said, adding that the system can be installed in five minutes per fixture.

“Commercial buildings represent a third of our power consumption in the state, and lighting represents 35 to 45 percent of that load,” he said. “A great part of the buildings are unoccupied and not using the light.”

GreenVolts, based in Berkeley, California, says it can lower the cost of rooftop solar-electric systems by 50 percent by using mirrors to concentrate sunlight into smaller solar cells. CEO Bob Cart says the company can concentrate sunlight at higher levels than its competitors, and also has a much more effective tracking system to follow the sun.

EDC Technologies, based in Ladera Ranch, California, says it can cut natural gas costs in hotels and apartment buildings by 15 to 30 percent with its energy efficiency system, which includes hardware, software, communications equipment, and services. Customers pay nothing up front, but agree to a monthly fee far less than the amount of energy savings they see, said Jim Seidel, vice president.

Owners and managers can monitor the energy costs online to see the savings, and will also be alerted if any energy equipment is not working properly, he said.

Crystal Clear Technologies, based in Portland, Oregon, has a nanocoating technology that can purify water at low cost. According to President Lisa Farmen, Crystal’s technology can purify enough water for one person for a year for materials costing only \$1. “With this money, we can not only develop this technology, but get it to the people who need it,” she said in her acceptance speech.

The startup can put the nanocoating on a number of low-cost substrates, including sand, Ms. Farmen said. The nanocoating removes all water-borne pathogens and chemicals from the water in about five seconds without

using electricity, she said. It also clumps the metals together so they can be recovered and not sent to a landfill,