

Energy project gets funding boost

Avista, WSU lab aiding research

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Avista Utilities and a Washington State University laboratory will contribute \$1 million to a grant fund for sustainable energy research, officials announced Wednesday.

To gain funding, projects require collaboration between Avista engineers and scientists at WSU's Applied Sciences Laboratory, benefit to utility customers, and use of outside money, according to Avista. The program will leverage the "brain trust" established at the lab, said Roger Woodworth, Avista's vice president of sustainable energy solutions.

ASL has recruited six senior faculty with doctorates in chemistry, physics and materials science.

The sustainable energy project will involve groups of engineers from all areas of Avista, said David Holmes, an Avista employee loaned to the lab as its manager for business and operations. While staff will look at technologies for standard renewable sources such as solar and wind power, they also could study technology for overall energy efficiency and cheaper materials, he said.

Researchers could investigate better materials for turbine blades, for example, he said.

Avista engineers will meet with researchers starting next month, with a goal of identifying the highest-priority opportunities by the end of the year, Woodworth said.

Started in 2004 using \$6.5 million in federal grant money, the Spokane-based contract lab is the applied science portion of WSU's Institute for Shock Physics. It focuses on research related to energy, national security and advanced materials.

The lab is "nothing less than a business" and should be mostly self-supporting, Yogendra "Yogi" Gupta, Shock Physics Institute director, said Wednesday morning at a meeting on WSU's Riverpoint campus.

"This is the hardest thing I've ever done in my life," Gupta said.

Researcher Choong-Shik Yoo, who holds a doctorate in physical chemistry, is awaiting word on a proposal to the Department of Homeland Security for a method to chemically

neutralize explosives – a project that could be worth \$1.6 million over four years, lab officials said.

"It's a significant step to be invited for the site visit, so it's very promising," said Sheila Heyns, the institute's manager for administration and operations.

ASL expects to find out next month whether it was selected, she said.

The lab has entered a "partnership agreement" with utility metering company Itron Inc. of Liberty Lake, Heyns said. Yoo and researcher Santanu Chaudhuri also have written three concept papers to Boeing relating to its all-composite aircraft, and an agreement is possible, Heyns said.

Supporters have raised about \$1.7 million in cash toward a goal of a \$15 million endowment for the lab, said Stacey Cowles, chairman of the endowment steering committee and publisher of The Spokesman-Review. Itron recently contributed \$250,000 to the endowment effort independent of any agreement, spokeswoman Christina Kelly said.

Holmes said the lab aims to have an operating facility in the original Sirti building by the end of the year.