

7. **RENEWABLE ENERGY: 'Feed-in tariff' boosters rebrand in bid to avoid 'tax' stigma** (04/27/2011)

Debra Kahn, E&E reporter

Proponents of a feed-in tariff for small-scale renewable energy projects are changing their message to avoid the dreaded "tax" stigma.

The FIT Coalition, a national group that includes former Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter (D), former CIA Director R. James Woolsey and World Bank renewable energy expert Dan Kammen among its advisers, changed its name to the CLEAN Coalition in January.

They're still pushing for the same policy, a fixed price and quota for local energy sold to utilities. It hasn't taken off in the United States like renewable energy standards and tax incentives have -- possibly for semantic reasons, its backers speculate.

"It's not as negatively evocative as 'feed-in tariff,'" said the group's associate executive director, Ted Ko. "We're getting some separation from the bad press and issues that have happened with feed-in tariffs in other parts of the world."

European policymakers are pulling back on tariffs in Germany, France, Italy and Spain. Generous feed-in subsidies have driven up electricity prices while spurring manufacturing in China, rather than the home markets ([ClimateWire](#), Feb. 25).

The Los Angeles Business Council changed the name of its "L.A. FIT" proposal to avoid more visceral connotations. The group is lobbying the city to establish a five-year, 150-megawatt program for local generators.

"It's hideous, what they think it means," said council president Mary Leslie. "They definitely think 'tariff' is a tax. Right away, something that should be an enormous benefit to people is viewed as a negative."

Leslie said the Rockefeller Brothers Fund commissioned focus groups last year in California, Colorado and Florida to test the appeal of "feed-in tariff." After considering alternatives like "Clean Energy Action Reward" and variations including "retrofits" and "benefits," they settled on the acronym "CLEAN": Clean Local Energy Accessible Now.

"We watched the focus groups; there's a pretty visceral negative reaction to 'tariff,'" she said. "It's just loaded. People get these grimaces on their face."

To be sure, the policy has a number of substantive obstacles, as well. In California, the expanded renewable energy standard just signed by Gov. Jerry Brown (D) has provisions in it that could hurt small renewables, Ko said.

"There's some old precedent in the law that the utilities sometimes use as reasons not to do more distributed generation," he said. "It's the kind of limitations that people put in there to try to control costs, but it ends up allowing the utilities to treat the standard as the maximum, not the minimum."

The process of hooking up projects to the local distribution grid also needs improvement, he said. Utility proposals now under consideration at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission could stretch the application process to two years. "This kind of interconnection process is really going to kill these programs," he said.

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