



Texas gets wind-energy lab

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Texas has won the right to develop a large-scale wind-turbine research facility that's expected to make the state a leader in wind power, officials said Monday.

The research laboratory, to be built at Ingleside just north of Corpus Christi, will engineer the next generation of wind-turbine technology. The project is designed to develop ways to produce more kilowatts per turbine than can be achieved now.

Energy Department Secretary Samuel W. Bodman said Monday in a statement that Texas' Lone Star Wind Alliance, a coalition of industry, government agencies and universities, will receive as much as \$2 million in test equipment to develop the lab.

The Energy Department estimates that the test lab will cost about \$20 million. The Lone Star Wind Alliance has pledged about \$18 million from state and private sources for initial capital and start-up costs.

The Texas research laboratory will be just one of two in the nation. The U.S. Department of Energy said the second lab will be built in Massachusetts. Texas and Massachusetts competed with Iowa, Maine, Ohio and Virginia.

Construction on the wind-turbine lab is expected to begin in 2008, and the facility is to be completed in 2009.

"This is the birth of a new industry here in Texas," Texas General Land Office Commissioner Jerry Patterson said in a statement. "Once we build these test facilities, the wind-turbine and blade manufacturers will come. There will be plenty of business for both Texas and Massachusetts to come out winners."

The facility will be built through a public-private partnership, organized through the National Renewable Energy Laboratory of the U.S. Department of Energy. Private wind-turbine and blade manufacturers are expected to fund the operations of the facility within five years of its construction.

"This is a great situation to be in," said Susan Williams Sloan, an Austin-based spokeswoman for the American Wind Energy Association, based in Washington. "As a Texan, I'm very excited."

Sloan said Texas won the wind-turbine research lab "as a result of a conglomeration of different parties: the state, associations and private business. The fact that there was so much interest from so many different entities speaks to where people think this industry is going."

Oil giant BP donated the 22 acres of land for the facility and \$250,000 toward funding it. Other Texas businesses also contributed, including Dow Chemical Co. and chemical company Huntsman Corp.

A wind-turbine lab is needed because there is not a site big enough to test the enormous wind turbines being built by the industry, said Jim Suydam, a spokesman for the General Land Office's Patterson. "So the industry is having to overengineer. Testing will allow the industry to better engineer and design these turbines and blades."

The wind-turbine lab may need only about a dozen workers, Suydam said. "But the expectation is that the industry will want to build sites next to this lab."

The Texas Legislature pledged \$5 million toward the construction of the lab. Gov. Rick Perry approved the expenditure in the final budget, Patterson said, and another \$5 million is pending final approval through the state's Emerging Technology Fund.

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