

# BUILDING OUR CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

A TOOLKIT FOR  
SUPPORTING  
WIND & SOLAR  
PROJECTS



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# BUILDING OUR CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

## A TOOLKIT FOR SUPPORTING WIND & SOLAR



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# INTRODUCTION

Around the world, we are seeing the effects of climate change, from shorter winters to dangerous heat waves, wildfires, and more frequent and severe storms. The year 2020 was the hottest year ever recorded, capping the warmest decade on record. The steps we take today will be critical to reducing the severity of climate change in the coming years, and we can create jobs that pay well and local economic benefits in the process.

Here in New York, our state lawmakers have set ambitious goals to reduce carbon pollution, the main driver of climate change, and power our communities with clean energy. [New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act \(CLCPA\)](#), signed into law in 2019, requires 70 percent renewable energy by 2030, 100 percent emission-free power by 2040, and a carbon-neutral economy by 2050. It will take all of us, working together, to achieve these important goals. To ensure success with new projects, **local support is critical**. [New Yorkers for Clean Power](#) and [The Nature Conservancy in New York](#) have created this toolkit to help communities across the state transform New York's economy and secure a safer future for our children.

An electricity system powered by renewable energy will bring cleaner air and water, a more resilient energy infrastructure, and a safer world for all of us. It will help create healthier communities for our families, strengthen local economies, and create jobs.

Building the necessary clean energy infrastructure requires community support and involvement. Your participation and advocacy can help ensure that we build the renewable projects we need, and that the projects in your community integrate local expertise, needs, and priorities. This toolkit will explain what you need to know about the planning and approval process, how you can support local wind and solar projects, and how you can help our state move away from fossil fuels that pollute our land, water, and air.



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## WHY WE NEED CLEAN ENERGY

Electricity is essential to our daily lives and to almost all economic activity. It is becoming even more important as we switch to electricity-based technologies to reduce climate pollution from other sectors, including transportation and buildings. Around 39 percent of New York’s power comes from fossil fuels (primarily natural gas), 33 percent comes from nuclear power, 22 percent comes from hydroelectric power, and 5 percent comes from clean energy sources, including wind and solar power (Source: [2020 Power Trends: The Vision for a Greener World](#), NY Independent System Operator). To meet New York State's climate goals, we will need to dramatically increase renewable energy generation over the next decade and eliminate fossil fuel-based generation entirely in just 20 years. To do this, we must greatly expand renewable energy development across the state.

Dirty fossil fuels threaten public health and safety. Air pollution from fossil fuels can cause or exacerbate numerous health problems, including stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and respiratory infections like pneumonia. Pollution in the form of greenhouse gas emissions also causes climate change, which threatens access to food and water and is already bringing fatal heat waves and hurricanes.

Apart from the climate, environmental, and public health benefits of clean power, investments in renewable energy resources will enable New York to generate its own energy. As fossil fuel prices are notoriously volatile, this will improve our energy security and stabilize costs. These investments will also create jobs in our communities and boost the local economy (Source: [Rocky Mountain Institute Seeds of Opportunity Report](#)).

**We must transition to clean power.** This transition will save lives, improve public health, and protect the future for our children and grandchildren. As dirty power plants age and retire, New York can replace them with safe, solar and wind power plants that don't burn out-of-state coal, oil, or natural gas. This transition will bring many important benefits: our electricity will be more reliable; our air and water will be cleaner; and we will have more well-paying jobs across the state. When new power plants are built, they create hundreds of construction jobs, and towns see a significant increase in economic activity due to the additional purchases of goods and services. After new facilities are built, permanent workers stay to operate and maintain the facility.



Wind and solar projects also provide rental income to landowners, as developers generally lease land rather than buying it (see box on Solar Land Leases for guidance for landowners leasing land for solar projects on page 6). Local governments and school districts benefit financially from revenue generated by a “Payment in Lieu of Taxes” (PILOT) agreement with the project developer. (In New York, as in many other states, Real Property Tax Law grants a 15-year property tax exemption to renewable systems, and PILOTs are typically negotiated in place of taxes to provide revenue to local taxing authorities. For more information, see [New York State's Real Property Tax Law 487 - NYSERDA](#).) The PILOT is negotiated through the county's Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and the revenues are split among the town, county, and school district. The renewable energy project still pays tax districts, such as water, sewer, and fire departments, throughout the life of the project.

In addition, communities often negotiate Host Community Agreements with developers to finance costs such as road repairs and to provide a community benefit (for example, a park or playground). In February 2021, the NYS Public Service Commission required that residents of host communities also receive an energy benefit from the project in the form of an annual bill credit on their utility bills for a ten-year period. **This new program is discussed further on page 11.**

Clean energy projects are already transforming some places in New York. For example, a wind project in Maple Ridge created 30 permanent jobs and provided revenue to the Lowville school district. Lowville was able to provide new laptops to students in grades 3–12, offer Advanced Placement classes, and update their athletic fields. School superintendent Cheryl Steckly said: “Our students go to the wind farm for field trips. They study wind and green energy in their

classrooms. We have a swim team called The Turbines that practices here.” Jeremy Kelly, a local restaurant owner, said, “The benefits that wind farms bring to the community are greater than any potential disadvantages.”

In Erie County, a former steel mill had been abandoned for 20 years. New wind projects in 2007 and 2012 helped to spark a community transformation, bringing a community center, commerce center, 110-acre greenway, and bike path to the community. In the town of Howard, supervisor Don Evia said, “This is a rural community. We don’t have industry coming in and helping us with taxes. We’ve never seen something like this that can help offset land taxes. This will bring us some relief for 20 years, and hopefully into the future after that.” The project will pay the community a total of nearly three million dollars, according to the agreement.

**Here is guidance for landowners leasing land for solar projects:**  
**[Solar Land Leases](#)**



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## CLEAN ENERGY 101

Let's start with learning the lingo. Once you understand the terms used in the world of energy development, you'll be more comfortable helping to create our clean energy future.

First, let's break down how we measure energy and how that relates to new energy projects. We measure power in **watts**, which describes how much power we use in a specific moment. In your house, the amount of energy that most appliances use is measured in **kilowatts (KW)**. Power plants and larger-scale renewable developments use a larger measurement, **megawatts**. One megawatt (MW) = 1,000 kilowatts = 1,000,000 watts. For perspective, one MW of solar requires five to eight acres of land and provides enough power, on average, for 160 homes.

Renewable projects of five MWs or less typically interconnect with the local electricity distribution system. Larger projects (20 MW, 25 MW, or 50 MW or more) typically interconnect with the electricity transmission system and serve a much wider swath of the state. These larger projects are often referred to as large-scale or utility-scale renewable resources. For a primer on the electricity grid, see the Natural Resources Defense Council's [Powering into the Future with Renewable, Reliable Power](#), and for a deeper dive, see the New York Independent System Operator's [Power Trends 2020 Report](#).

# HOW NEW YORK STATE REVIEWS NEW ENERGY DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Renewable projects have different review and approval processes, based on their size. Projects under 25 MW are governed by the [State Environmental Quality Review \(SEQR\)](#) and local zoning laws, just like other local development projects. Projects that are 25 MW or greater have until recently been governed by [Article 10 of the Public Service Law](#), administered by the NYS Department of Public Service. In 2020, [the Accelerated Renewable Energy Growth and Community Benefit Act](#) was passed in New York to expedite the review and approval of projects 25 MW in size or larger and to require a community benefit for the host community. The regulations for the new review and approval process are being finalized and are expected to be in place by April 2021. Until then, large-scale projects may apply to switch over to the new siting process or continue to follow the Article 10 process.

In addition to federal and state laws, local regulations may apply to new clean energy projects, depending on where you live. New York has approximately 1,600 cities, towns, and villages. Each town has zoning requirements that outline what can be built where, including where new energy projects can go. Some towns also have comprehensive plans that lay out a vision for the future. Through zoning and comprehensive plans, towns can encourage or discourage new clean energy development.



The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) provides local governments with [several resources](#) to manage clean energy development in their communities. The resources include step-by-step instructions and tools to guide the implementation of clean energy, including permitting processes, property taxes, siting, zoning, and more.

## CLEAN ENERGY PROJECTS UNDER 25 MW

As part of [the SEQR process](#), if a proposed project could have negative effects on the environment, the developer is required to create an environmental impact statement. This report must be made available to the public, after which the public has 30 days to review, ask questions, and provide comments or input. A public hearing may also be held, after which the public comment period is extended for an additional 10 days.

After receiving public input, the developer must issue a final environmental impact statement



that **1)** responds to all the public comments they received and **2)** addresses each area of concern and outlines how the developer will avoid, minimize, or mitigate any potential negative effects on the environment.

You can review the timeline of the SEQR process [here](#).

**For more information on how to participate in the public process, contact:**

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation,  
Division of Environmental Permits  
625 Broadway, 4th floor, Albany, NY 12233-1750  
depermitting@dec.ny.gov • 518-402-9167

## CLEAN ENERGY PROJECTS 25 MW AND OVER

### ***The Article 10 Process (25 MW+ projects initiated prior to 2021)***

Under the [Article 10](#) process, administered by the NYS Department of Public Service, each project is reviewed by a Siting Board that has the authority to approve construction and operation of the project. The Siting Board consists of seven members, including two members from the community.

Developers are required to create a Public Improvement Program (PIP) with community input. The PIP explains how the developer will provide information on the project and how much time the community has to review and give input on the project proposal. When developing a PIP, the developer is required to work with local stakeholders, including affected citizens and environmental justice organizations, to collectively create a community engagement plan.

A standard part of outreach is for the developer to hold public meetings for community members to learn about the project, ask questions, raise concerns, and provide input. To find out when public events are being held, visit your town website, call the town office, or stop by the town hall to inquire about town board meeting times and agendas. To contact the developer, or if you see a project in your town, you can look up the project online; most projects have their own website. To find an Article 10 project close to you, visit this [Department of Public Service resource](#).

There are opportunities for communities to give input on the proposed projects and funds for local participation by registering as an intervenor. An intervenor is a third party that seeks funding to defray expenses incurred by the municipality as it prepares for a new clean energy project. Becoming an intervenor, as a supporter group, is a great way to participate and support solar and wind projects. You can find a guide to intervenor funding below. Developers of new renewable energy projects are assessed a fee by New York State to cover the costs of intervenor

funding, and the State disperses these funds to registered intervenors.

Current projects that are over 25 MW can switch to the new process, described under NYS Office of Renewable Energy Siting below, instead of continuing with the Article 10 process.

**For more information on how to participate in the public process of Article 10, contact:**

James Denn  
Public Information Coordinator for the  
New York State Department of Public Service  
3 Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223  
james.denn@dps.ny.gov • 518-474-7080

**For a deeper dive into the Article 10 process, see the following:**

- A [timeline of the Article 10 process](#).
- A [list of current Article 10 projects](#) with a submitted Public Improvement Program (PIP) is available.
- Guidance from the Department of Public Service about [what must be included in a PIP](#).
- A [guide to intervenor funding for Article 10](#).

***NYS Office of Renewable Energy Siting Process (20 MW+ projects proposed after 2021)***

The NYS Office of Renewable Energy Siting was created in 2021 as part of the [Accelerated Renewable Energy Growth and Community Benefit Act](#) to speed up the process of siting. Larger renewable developments take 5–10 years under the Article 10 process, and as a result, only a handful of renewable projects have completed the process to date. Because of the urgent need



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to accelerate the shift to clean energy and mitigate climate change, a new state law was passed in 2020 to make the review and approval process faster and more efficient. The Accelerated Renewable Energy Growth and Community Benefit Act, also called 94-C, required the creation of uniform standards for the siting of renewable projects across the state. It also created a new Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES) within the Department of State to review and approve projects. The uniform standards were developed with input from public hearings and written public comments submitted to ORES, and the regulations are being finalized with a deadline of April 2021. Even with the application of uniform standards, site-specific conditions and local land-use priorities and goals are still considered in the review process. The new law also creates a funding mechanism to enable a third party, including a community group, to participate as an intervenor in the process.

Under the new ORES process, project reviews are to be completed within one year. To incentivize the siting of renewable projects on brownfields and disturbed lands, the required timeframe for the review and approval process is shortened to six months.

Projects that are 25 MW in size or larger are required to proceed through the new ORES process but projects between 20-24 MW in size may opt in to this review process rather than proceed through the SEQR process described earlier for smaller projects.



The Accelerated Renewable Energy Growth and Community Benefit Act directed the Public Service Commission to set up a mechanism for a wind or solar project to provide an energy benefit to host communities. In February 2021, the Commission approved a new program requiring the renewable energy owner to provide an annual energy benefit to all residential customers in the host community for a ten-year period. Importantly, the program is intended to complement (and not replace) other benefits negotiated between the renewable energy owner and host communities (e.g., PILOT agreement, host community agreements, and/or other benefits). Under the new program, residential electricity customers of host communities will receive an annual bill credit on their utility bills for each utility-scale project. The project owner will fund the bill credits by paying an annual fee of \$500/MW (for solar) and \$1,000/MW (for wind), to be divided up equally among residential customers.

[Here is a list of projects](#) transferring from Article 10 to NYS's new Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES).

**Contact ORES:** Office of Renewable Energy Siting  
Empire State Plaza  
240 State Street, P-1 South, J Dock, Albany, NY 12242  
[ores.ny.gov/form/contact-form](https://ores.ny.gov/form/contact-form) • 518-473-4590

# GETTING INVOLVED



## HOW TO HELP CLEAN ENERGY PROJECTS SUCCEED IN YOUR TOWN

Local support for clean energy projects is critical to their success. Sometimes, just a few voices of opposition can delay or even prevent clean energy projects from moving forward. Right now, there are more voices opposing new clean energy projects than there are supporting them, even though public polling repeatedly shows that a majority of New Yorkers support new clean energy projects. **We need people who support the responsible development of clean energy to make their voices heard too.**

Getting started on voicing your support can be intimidating. Many new advocates like to join a group to learn about the issues, encourage their community to build clean energy, and attend public meetings together to voice support for new clean energy projects. The best place to start is with people you know. Are any of your neighbors, friends, or colleagues concerned about climate change, interested in clean energy, or advocates of local job creation? If you know people who already support clean energy, that's great. Start a general conversation about what they would think of a wind or solar project in your community. If there is a specific project proposed nearby, ask them what they think of it. If you don't know anyone personally, you can start reaching out to people wherever you're active in your community—whether that's on social media channels, in your house of worship, at the park, or at your local cafe.

Once you find a fellow supporter or two, you can form a group! Whether it's informal or formal, a group can be powerful. After a project has been proposed in your town, you can ask to meet with the developer to learn more about their project, start building a relationship with them, and tell the developer you want to advocate for the project.

## ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE ON YOUR OWN

### *Get Informed!*

- Learn about the project and share your knowledge with friends, neighbors, and colleagues
- Meet with the developer to learn more about the project, build a good working relationship, and give input on important community places, issues, and values.



### *Get Connected!*

- Host a public meeting or house party to discuss the project.
- Talk to people around town or hand out information to your neighbors at the farmers' market, local festivals, or other town events.
- Attend meetings and/or make public comments in support of a local project or a comprehensive plan encouraging new clean energy development.
- Start a local petition. It can help you demonstrate local support for clean energy and help you build a list of people to invite to events about clean energy. Just make sure to ask permission to contact someone after they sign.

### *Raise Your Voice!*

- Make the case for clean energy locally and talk about the benefits it will bring to your community.
- Call in or ask to speak on a local radio or TV station.
- Write a letter to the Siting Board; it can be signed by you or multiple individuals.
- Write an opinion piece for your local blog or letter to the editor of the local newspaper. [See an example.](#)

## GET MORE POWERFUL BY WORKING WITH OTHERS!

Here are some more ways to connect with people and use your collective voice to support clean energy.

### *Get Organized!*

- When you find someone who's also passionate about clean energy, **team up!** You can talk about who they know and how you can support each other's efforts.
- Choose a name for your group and write a group description that quickly explains why you exist and what you are trying to do (often called a purpose or mission statement). This will come in handy when you're talking to people and they want to learn more.
- If you have a graphic artist in your group (or want to hire one), you could create a group logo to put on lawn signs and t-shirts. If someone in your group knows how, you could also create a website.
- Choose someone to be a co-leader with you! You can help keep things moving together—whether it's identifying a few people to speak at an upcoming meeting or sharing a recent news article.
- Ask someone to manage your membership list. This person would keep track of your supporters (names, emails, and phone numbers).
- Create materials (design a logo, a website, signs, or shirts) that describe the project and the benefits it would bring your community: a fact sheet, a story on social media, or an infographic.
- Create a Frequently Asked Questions document that includes project information such as the size of the installation, the proposed location, the plan for decommissioning what was previously on the site, what the project will look like or how it will be hidden (called a "viewscape"), how it will benefit the community, how it will affect or work with any local farms, and the plan for maintaining the facility (landscaping, native habitat, grazing, etc.).



## ***Stay Informed!***

- Select someone to track when public events are scheduled. Showing up to meetings is the key to success! This person would regularly visit your town website, call the town, or stop by the town hall to ask about town board meeting times and agendas.
- Choose someone to regularly attend town board meetings. These meetings are a really good way to meet people, build relationships, and learn more about how your town works.
- Consider having your group become an intervenor to access intervenor funding. (An intervenor is a third party that seeks funding to defray expenses incurred by the municipality as it prepares for a new clean energy project.) Here is a [guide to intervenor funding for Article 10](#).
- Choose someone to be the liaison with the developer, so the developer has a lead contact for your group and you can easily ask the developer questions, get information, and keep track of the project's progress and setbacks.

### **CONNECT AND LEARN WITH OTHER GROUPS:**

**There is strength and power in numbers! Here are a few useful groups.  
Explore their websites and don't hesitate to reach out to  
ask questions or just introduce your group.**

- New Yorkers for Clean Power: [nyforcleanpower.org](http://nyforcleanpower.org)
- United Solar Energy Supporters: [usesusa.org](http://usesusa.org)
- Friends of Upstate NY Wind: [friendsofupstatenywind.org](http://friendsofupstatenywind.org)
- Local Sierra Club chapter: [atlantic2.sierraclub.org](http://atlantic2.sierraclub.org)

## ***Take Action!***

- When a public meeting is scheduled about clean energy or a proposed project, get as many people as possible to attend the meeting and speak or comment in support of the project. Make sure to help people feel comfortable speaking at meetings. That could mean giving them a sample script or talking points that are short and directed (see the resources section for guidance on page 17).
- Request a meeting with your local elected official, such as a city council member or town board member. Ask them to publicly support clean energy projects in your town.

- **Work with any known supportive town officials and the project developer to make a strong case for a local project.** They may be able to help with a project description, provide a fact sheet about the project, or help you design a logo, a website, signs, or shirts.
- Do a door-to-door canvass of your community, especially neighborhoods and land owners close to the project.
- Take your passion on the road! Offer to make a short presentation (in-person or virtual) to community groups—schools, houses of worship, libraries, community centers, senior centers, and neighborhood associations. When possible, record your presentation to share with those who weren't able to attend.
- It's valuable to have many community members, groups, and institutions express strong support for local clean energy projects. As you meet more supporters, try to identify influential community members, groups, or institutions who are comfortable speaking on the issue and who are trusted by friends, family, and the community. These can include firefighters, nurses, teachers, faith leaders, local businesses, unions, and many others.
- Ask local groups and institutions to join your efforts.
- You can also work together to help your community pass a law that will welcome a wind or solar project, while including any safeguards your community needs. Find [more information on solar here](#).





# RESOURCES

The following are suggested key messages that you can use when talking to friends or neighbors, speaking up at town meetings, or writing a letter to your local newspaper. It's always best to tailor what you say to your specific audience, add your own messages, and focus on what is most important to you.

## 1. I care about building clean energy in [town name] because...

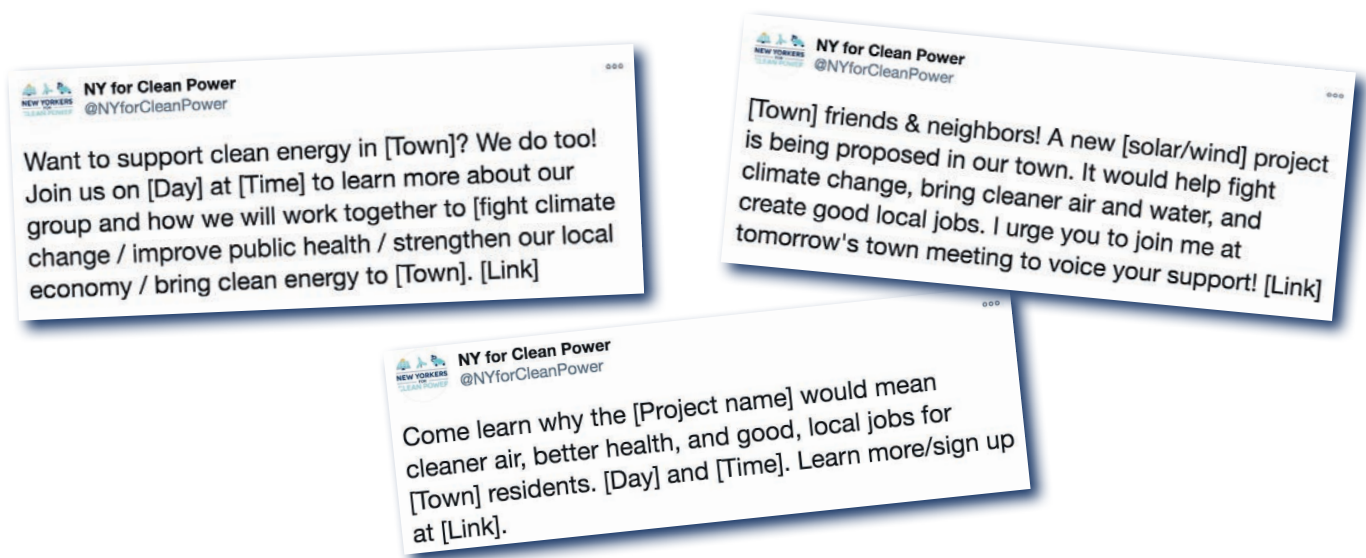
- a. I'm worried about climate change.
- b. I'm worried about pollution in our water.
- c. I want safe, reliable energy that comes from our state.
- d. We need local jobs that pay well.
- e. We owe it to our children to do everything we can to protect our future.

## 2. I support [project] going forward because...

- a. It will power our homes and businesses with local, clean, reliable energy.
- b. It will bring many jobs that pay well to our community.
- c. It will guarantee a safer future for our children and grandchildren.
- d. It will improve public health, reducing the incidence of diseases and early deaths.
- e. It will slow climate change, which threatens our access to food and water.

Here is a [sample letter to the editor](#) that you can use as a guide.

## SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA TWEETS





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## SAMPLE FACT SHEETS

**You could write fact sheets on the following topics:**

- Myths about renewable energy
- Here is what people might say—and here are the facts
- Impacts on property values/economic development for community

**Here are some sample fact sheets you could refer people to or use as inspiration:**

- [FAQs](#) about solar energy (from United Solar Energy Supporters)
- [Frequently Asked Questions About Wind Energy in Upstate New York](#) (from Friends of Upstate New York State Wind)
- [New York State Wind Myths & Facts](#) (from Friends of Upstate New York State Wind)

## LEGAL ASSISTANCE

[Renewable Energy Legal Defense Initiative](#) (RELDI) provides pro-bono legal representation to community groups and local residents supporting renewable energy development in their communities who may benefit from legal advice and counsel.

## VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT TIPS

Check out [What It Takes to Run a Great Virtual Meeting](#) (from the Harvard Business Review)

# GOOD LUCK ON YOUR JOURNEY TO SUPPORT CLEAN ENERGY IN NEW YORK STATE

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Remember, a clean energy future will bring  
cleaner air and water, more predictable energy,  
and a safer world for all of us!



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