

CleantechAlps: open door to an entire region's expertise



Eric Plan, Chief Operation Officer of CleantechAlps

For **Eric Plan**, Switzerland is a natural site for a cleantech cluster. "Sustainable use of resources is already an integral part of daily life here," says the **Chief Operation Officer of CleantechAlps**, the new organization launched in June 2010 to coordinate the sector's development in Western Switzerland.

It is true that the country generates almost 60% of its electricity from renewable sources, the wastewater treatment network covers most of the country, recycling has become second nature to Swiss people, and construction standards are among the most energy efficient in the world.

It is also true that the region's universities and engineering schools have led to the spin-off of a number of innovative companies and that on-going research, both pure and applied, is helping to push the limits of the possible.

CleantechAlps is the fourth cluster launched by Western Switzerland's ministers of economic affairs (CDEP-SO) to diversify the region's economic base. Earlier clusters include BioAlps, for life sciences, Alp ICT, for information and communication technology, and Micronarc, for micro- and nanotechnology. CleantechAlps is now the main point of contact in Western Switzerland regarding cleantech.

CleantechAlps works as a gateway in both directions. For R&D institutes, SMEs and start-ups, it offers the greater strength and visibility of numbers. For established companies looking for open innovation opportunities, it provides precious information and networking. The CleantechAlps website is the first place to look for information on setting up a cleantech company anywhere in Western Switzerland, e.g., technology transfer, research at technology parks, government support for innovation and commercial development, etc.

Eric Plan acknowledges that cleantech is a vast field and the companies that make up the CleantechAlps cluster are concentrated in areas where the country has a natural advantage: small-scale hydraulic

Swiss Village in Masdar City

Companies based in Western Switzerland are playing a leading role in the Swiss Village project in Masdar City, the cleantech showcase under construction in Abu Dhabi.

energy (Switzerland has over 1000 small hydroelectric power stations amounting to around 760 MW installed power and producing 3400 GWh annually); photovoltaic solar energy (current installed capacity: 30 MW); waste recovery (annual average, over 360 kg per person); water treatment (97% of Swiss households are connected to the sewer system); technology for smart grids to ensure network stability (the Swiss electricity network has for decades acted as an international platform guaranteeing the balance of supply and demand); industrial ecology (using the waste products of one industry as the raw materials for another, thereby optimizing energy use and reducing the environmental impact, as, for example, at the Monthey industrial site); and energy efficiency (Switzerland's Minergie® and Minergie P® energy consumption standards are among the most demanding in the world).

"CleantechAlps has chosen to focus its activities on developing industries with high added-value for the economic fabric of Western Switzerland," Eric Plan says. "Switzerland already has some 160,000 people working in cleantech. With the growth expected over the next 10 years, we can expect this figure to double."

www.cleantech-alps.com

Western Switzerland

- Bern
- Fribourg
- Geneva
- Jura
- Neuchâtel
- Valais
- Vaud