

NEMA meeting this week evolves into energy summit

With the financial and energy world growing more uncertain by the day, NEMA changed the focus of its two-day conference starting tomorrow in New Jersey.

"What began as NEMA's Annual Fall Leadership Roundtable has expanded into an energy policy summit of Northeast and Mid-Atlantic state and federal officials -- and the leaders of an emerging high-growth energy services and technology industry," said NEMA President Craig Goodman.

NEMA hopes to bring together CEOs of energy services and technology firms from around the country to help solve problems both homeowners and businesses face in coping with the credit and economic crises.

"Interest in competitively priced energy services and technologies has increased significantly given the economic downturn, shrinking budgets and the need to cut both costs and consumption," said Goodman.

"Rules that permit competitive energy services and technology providers to enter traditionally monopolized markets can ease the mounting financial pressures facing every homeowner and business across the country."

The plan calls for participants to discuss fair, transparent and consumer-focused ways to educate the public about energy and technology choices available in the marketplace today.

"Energy policy officials and industry leaders attending NEMAs roundtable will explore the impacts of the credit crunch on the energy market and identify competitive, market-based energy policies at the state and national level that can help strengthen local, regional and national economies," Goodman added.

"Energy competition drives price, service and technology innovation, providing greater value to help consumers."

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Thin film solar factory opens with fanfare in Austin

HelioVolt opened the first factory for manufacturing high-performance thin film solar energy products in Austin, Texas Friday.

The factory is expected to create about 160 new jobs and was welcomed by city, state and federal officials.

"Integrating environmental sustainability, new green jobs and technology innovation, HelioVolt is precisely the type of emerging leader in the global renewable energy industry that this city values," said Austin Mayor Will Wynn.

The factory marks the first commercial implementation of HelioVolt's proprietary FASST reactive transfer printing process for solar thin film production.

The process is designed to bring solar energy to grid-parity by combining lower cost thin film materials with better manufacturing efficiencies and high quality end products.

The process delivers solar cells with better than 12% conversion efficiency in six minutes, placing them among the

best performing thin film products on the market.

"Clean and renewable energy technologies likely represent the single greatest economic opportunity of our generation," said HelioVolt's CEO and Founder, Dr BJ Stanbery.

The firm's thin film products and their manufacturing system were developed in cooperation with the National Renewable Electricity Laboratory and won an R&D Magazine Editor's Choice Award for Most Revolutionary Technology.

"Thin film PV technology is already impacting the energy industry by significantly lowering the cost of generating electricity from the sun with the use of less material," said NREL Director Dan Arvizu.

The manufacturing process produces thin film products reportedly 10 to 100 times faster than competitive methods and it can be sped up even more when combined with NREL-developed methods.

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House Energy responds to CFTC's finding on speculation

Leading Democrats on the House Energy & Commerce Committee wrote the CFTC Friday expressing skepticism on its claims that this year's energy price run-ups weren't due to speculation.

Chairman John Dingell, D-Mich, Chair of the Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations Bart Stupak, D-Mich, and Chair of the Energy & Air Quality Subcommittee Rick Boucher signed the letter.

Energy prices doubled in a move that appeared divorced from changes in the

fundamentals of supply and demand.

Meanwhile, index investments in commodities were growing and many of those happened in over-the-counter swaps markets that the CFTC didn't have any data on.

The commission asked investment banks and index funds to send it some information on such trades -- and it released its analysis of that, saying the speculative trading didn't have an impact on prices. Indeed, the practice declined as prices ballooned from the