

B.C. clean-techs score big with pre-commercial products

\$30 million in grants from the feds boosts credibility among potential investors

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 Technology (/sections/technology/)

By Tyler Orton

An open letter from 50 CEOs of B.C. clean-technology firms calling for billions in spending from Ottawa wasn't enough to make the federal government blanch earlier this month.

Leading up to March's Globe 2016 sustainability conference, business leaders implored Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to strike a working group, develop a national clean-tech strategy and increase spending on technology still under development.

Days later, five signatories creating potentially game-changing technology collected an extra \$30 million in federal funding from Sustainable Development Technology Canada (SDTC).

"All of these types of programs give investors confidence because you have a number of different, very well-informed organizations digging into the technology and doing their own due diligence," said Inventys CEO André Boulet, whose Burnaby-based clean-tech firm was awarded \$3.1 million.

While chemical solvents known as amines serve as the backbone for most carbon capture technology, Inventys has developed a device that uses solid material known as adsorbents to absorb and redistribute carbon.

Boulet said the SDTC funding will help Inventys deploy the technology through a pilot program with Husky Energy (TSX:HSE) in Saskatchewan.

General Fusion's \$12.8 million grant was the most SDTC awarded to a B.C. company in 2016.

It's developing technology that harnesses fusion power – a process by which atoms release energy when they are merged and lose mass.

CEO Nathan Gilliland told Business in Vancouver a large prototype is still about a year away.

Loop Energy also cashed in on the power source game last month. The company collected \$7.5 million from SDTC to help it commercialize fuel cells to power emission-free heavy-duty trucks.

President Ben Nyland said his technology can compete financially without subsidies while matching the performance of gas- or diesel-powered equipment.

“Our initial beachhead is working with container-shipping ecosystems.”

Nyland added that Loop Energy is in the midst of putting two demonstration trucks on the road at the Port of Los Angeles, where port regulators and operators want to reduce or eliminate emissions.

Peter Wilken, director of Vancouver-based BioCube, said Trudeau’s visit to his company’s Globe conference exhibit was encouraging. But for the sake of politeness Wilken didn’t assail the prime minister with concerns over the challenges it’s having commercializing its mobile bio-diesel refinery.

“Those roadblocks could easily be taken out of the way,” Wilken told BIV. “We are not asking for subsidies for biofuel. ... All we ask for is a level playing field. And that means taking the subsidies away from fossil fuel [companies].”

BioCube is instead focused on commercializing its product in developing markets.

In December, its Canadian-built refinery journeyed upriver on a barge running through the Democratic Republic of Congo. It was the company’s first sale in Africa, and the mobile refinery now provides power to a palm oil mill in a remote plantation where diesel fuel is expensive and difficult to buy.

Wilken said BioCube has produced five fully commercialized units ready to ship, while blue-chip companies in Africa, India and Indonesia have already ordered trial machines.

“We’re very, very close to breaking into large-scale orders.”

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Sustainable Development Technology Canada (SDTC) awarded seven B.C. cleantech firms a total of \$30 million on March 4 to pursue the commercialization of technology focused on sustainability.

SDTC evaluations are considered some of the most rigorous in Canada and Loop Energy president **Ben Nyland** said the reputation behind it adds credibility to the technology that has yet to hit the market.

The following companies all received funding from SDTC:

- **General Fusion**, \$12.8 million: fusion energy reactor
- **Loop Energy**, \$7.5 million: low-cost, high-performance fuel cells
- **Inventys**, \$3.1 million: carbon capture machine
- **Teck Resources** (TSX:TCK.B), \$2.6 million: green approach to copper recovery
- **Nano One Materials**, \$2.1 million: materials for electric car batteries
- **Syscor Controls**, \$1.6 million: pipeline leak detection
- **Ronin8 Technologies**, \$300,000: electronic waste recycling

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