

US Energy Chief: Gulf Spill Tragic

AP Wire Service

ORONO, ME (AP) – U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu said recently the oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico underscores the need to develop wind power and a national energy plan.

A longtime advocate of wind power, Chu toured the University of Maine's Advanced Structures and Composites Center to learn more about its plans to design and test floating deep-water wind turbine platforms. Maine officials hope to have a wind farm in operation off the coast within six years.

Chu said the oil spill was "a tragedy" that served to highlight the imperative for a national energy plan.

"It's another reminder to step back and say, 'We do need a comprehensive energy strategy in the United States for the coming decades,'" he said.

Habib Dagher, the center director, said a greater push for renewable energy could be something good to come out of the calamity in the Gulf.

"It's a major disaster and the sooner we can find other ways to power the country, the better off we're going to


be," Dagher said.

The University of Maine has received more than \$25 million in federal funding for its work on wind power. Maine voters last week approved a bond that provides another \$11 million to help a university-led consortium develop a test site that's expected to be in operation in 2012 near Monhegan Island off Maine's midcoast.

Dagher said the plan is to have the first small-scale offshore wind farm, with five 5-megawatt turbines, operating between 2014 and 2016 and a farm

with 200 turbines up and running by 2020. All the farms would be 10 to 50 miles offshore, out of sight from land.

Gov. John Baldacci, Sen. Susan Collins and U.S. Reps. Michael Michaud and Chellie Pingree accompanied Chu on his hour-long visit led by Dagher.

"Secretary Chu's visit recognizes the intense commitment and broad-based support behind renewable energy development in Maine," Baldacci said. "We've worked hard to build the technological and work force strengths that have put Maine on this path." 

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