

USEA To Hold Press Briefing on Distributed Energy Resources and Virtual Power Plants

Electric utilities and environmentalists have come together on the latest megatrend in electricity supply: Distributed Energy Resources.

WASHINGTON DC, USA, March 28, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The United States Energy



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Llewellyn King

Association will hold a virtual press briefing on Friday, March 31 at 11 a.m. Eastern Time to examine the challenges for distributed energy resources (DER) and virtual power plants (VPPs).

The background is this: Relations between electric utilities and the environmental movement have often been stressed. Now they are happily united on the latest megatrend in electricity supply: DER.

“They are desirable for balancing the intermittency of solar and wind resources. Also, they are the building blocks of the VPPs — a favorite concept of the environmental

community, and which is supported by the Biden administration,” says journalist Llewellyn King.

DER take up the slack in the electricity system and enhance the available power supply without building new generation or new transmission. Almost by definition they must be close to demand centers and be available to the utility during peak electricity hours.

The contributing sources can include rooftop solar — especially if it is linked to batteries — and other ancillary generation from sources such as commercial and residential generators, installed to serve during blackouts. Many installations — for example, hospitals and department stores — have backup generators and batteries that can be called on to help the utilities.

As more electric vehicles are deployed, these can be used to boost power supply by reversing their flow. School buses and daytime delivery vehicles are eyed as an important future distributed resource.

Conservation is a key part of the DER future with utilities contracting with consumers to put some of their electricity use into abeyance during shortage by turning off washing machines,

water heaters, and other appliances that can be used when there is more power. In the commercial and industrial sectors this “interruptible” is a major resource for the utility. Non-essential heating and cooling also can be remotely turned off and later reengaged.

Ensuring the smooth functioning of DER depends on the wide deployment of smart meters as well as excellent and resilient communication between the utility and its archipelago of storage and generation entities.

Without comprehensive data flows, instant data interpretation, and state-of-the-art communications systems, utilities would neither be able to contemplate the DER future with such enthusiasm nor to look forward to these becoming VPPs.

The road ahead of DER and, eventually, the virtual utility has many barriers: technical, regulatory and political. Although the Department of Energy is ready with loan guarantees and has endorsed DER and VPPs, these are still nascent.

At the briefing — part of a series — a panel of energy journalists will question experts in the field of DER and VPPs. Llewellyn King serves as the organizer and moderator. [USEA](#) Acting Executive Director Sheila Hollis gives opening and closing remarks.

The experts:

Jon Wellinghoff, Former Chairman of FERC and Chief Regulatory Officer, Voltus, Inc.

Rudy Garza, President, CPS Energy, San Antonio, TX

Duane Highley, CEO, Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Denver, CO

John Reynolds, President, Agile Fractal Grid

The reporters:

Herman Trabish, Utility Dive

Jennifer Hiller, The Wall Street Journal

Ken Silverstein, Forbes

Rod Kuckro, Freelance

Matt Chester, Energy Central

The briefing will be held on Zoom. It is open to the press and the public who can ask questions via the chat function. A recording and transcript will be available on the USEA website

<https://usea.org>

[Register](#) here:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_L6LrKzWQSNWMMulHqYkTchA

Llewellyn King

White House Media LLC

+1 2024412702

llewellynking1@gmail.com

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