

Cleantech, or clean technology, is a blanket term referring to a variety of environmentally-friendly practices and technologies. Investment in cleantech has increased substantially since the term was first popularized in the late 1990s. Today, cleantech jobs are among the fastest-growing in the United States. As we continue to diversify our economy, EDAWN is focusing on several technology sectors, one of which is cleantech. What is cleantech, and why is it a good fit for our region and economy?

What is cleantech? Cleantech is much more than electric vehicles. Often used interchangeably with the term Greentech, [cleantech] has emerged as an umbrella term encompassing clean energy, environmental, and sustainable or green products and services. There are eight main cleantech categories, and of these categories, three are getting the most attention: energy & power, agriculture & food, and mobility & transportation. For our region, I would add waste and recycling.

Why is cleantech a good fit for Reno-Sparks? There are many reasons we are such a good fit for cleantech. First of all, we are associated with several environmentally friendly companies, like Tesla and Ormat. Additionally, we have successfully attracted many cleantech companies developing new ways to produce batteries, battery recycling, and green energy, including biofuels and 100% renewable energy data centers like Switch. Our flourishing entrepreneurial ecosystem is creating new companies that measure emissions or provide leading-edge recycling technologies that are growing this sector into an attractive cluster that is likely to attract or innovate even more cleantech companies in the future.

While we are off to a great start, what can we do to seize on this opportunity? On the government side, embracing sustainability and addressing ways to reduce our carbon footprint demonstrates our support and promotion of cleantech. Additionally, state support for innovation and start-up activity will fuel the creation of even more cleantech start-ups. A start-up may spin-off from existing cleantech companies or grow in the accelerators or innovation centers designed to support their success. EDAWN has already targeted the cleantech sector, and many of the new companies coming to our region are a result of these efforts. These high-wage, high-growth companies are precisely what we need to transition our economy to the Fourth Industrial Revolution types of jobs we will need as more existing jobs being replaced by automation and AI.

We have a competitive advantage that is changing our community and our state. We can do it all here, from lithium extraction, battery technology, and manufacturing, to end-of-life battery recycling. And that is just in one category. We have a wealth of green energy production in our state with a renewable energy goal of 50% by 2030 and a “quality of life” that will help to attract the talent we need to grow this industry. However, it will also take a concerted effort to improve our education system, emphasizing STEM (STEAM) skills while pushing for innovation and entrepreneurial growth. We are poised to grow this “economy of the future” right here and now. Let’s become the cleantech center of the U.S. or even the world!