

Steamy prospects for Reno during national geothermal summit

By Jason Hildago, Reno Gazette-Journal

It's a sunny, summer day in August, and several employees inside a control room are clearly feeling the heat in more ways than one.

As workers at Ormat Technologies' Steamboat Geothermal Power Plant Complex in Reno, the control room guys are charged with overseeing an operation that generates 89 megawatts of energy – enough electricity to support the entire residential load of Reno.

The state-of-the-art equipment in the room also allows the employees to monitor other Ormat operations, including a waste heat system that creates energy by harnessing excess heat from a natural gas pipeline that runs from Canada to Chicago.

Most of the heat today, however, is coming from several pairs of inquisitive eyes right behind the employees. The visitors are part of several group tours arranged Tuesday as part of the Geothermal Energy Association's first National Geothermal Summit. One pair of those inquisitive eyes belongs to Karl Gawell, executive director of the association.

For Gawell, having attendees – including policy makers – see a geothermal plant up close and personal is critical when it comes to promoting the technology. The Steamboat facility is particularly special because it is right next to a metropolitan area, Gawell said.

"It's important for people to see that geothermal can be a good neighbor," said Gawell from a hill overlooking the

complex during another leg of the tour. “If you look down, you can see a geothermal plant right there, but you can also see a shopping mall across the road behind it. Most people don’t even know there’s a plant here. Geothermal uses the smallest amount of land for the amount of electricity it generates.”

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