

10 reasons Switzerland is a cleantech leader

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Switzerland consistently ranks as one of the world's most energy-efficient economies, thanks largely to advances in renewable energy, green buildings, waste management and sustainable transportation. Switzerland was also recently ranked second on the [2010 Environmental Performance Index](#) [1].

Switzerland's sustainable/cleantech investment market at the end of 2009 was approximately \$30 billion. Switzerland also was recently nominated for recognition as [Europe's most innovative country in 2009](#) [2].

Given this strong history, capital base and innovate spirit, I wanted to take a closer look at the driving forces behind the burgeoning Swiss cleantech movement. Below are the top 10 reasons, as I see it, as to why Switzerland has become a powerhouse in this expanding economic sector.

1. The Swiss are true pioneers in sustainable and cleantech investing. [Bank Sarasin](#) [3] led the way in 1989 with the first asset management mandates defined by ecological criteria. Zurich powerhouse [Sustainable Asset Management](#) [4] (SAM) created specialized fund more than 10 years ago and has also been at the forefront of sustainable investing.
2. Switzerland has set itself apart as the financial global hub of cleantech investing. Swiss companies play key leadership roles in multiple sustainable/cleantech financial sectors. Whether investing in public companies with climate mitigation strategies or a private venture with an innovative solar technology, the Swiss have a wide range of investment firms that are international leaders in cleantech. Additionally, Switzerland is now home to a huge pool of cleantech money from financial powerhouses such as [Mountain Cleantech](#) [5], [SAM](#) [4], [Good Energies](#) [6], [Emerald Ventures](#) [7], [UBS](#) [8], [Picet](#) [9], [Sarasin](#) [3], [Credit Suisse](#) [10], [ZKB](#) [11] and [Unigestion](#) [12].
3. The Swiss have a long history of living within their environmental and economic means. I think Nick Beglinger from [Swisscleantech](#) [13] said it best: "The Swiss have a culture and lifestyle that emphasizes sustainability in their daily lives." The Swiss have one of the highest recycling rates in the world—they recycle up to 95 percent of glass and they use 50 percent of the energy per capita compared to the U.S. Recycling, energy efficiency and stewardship are integrated into daily life in Switzerland. Even [Mobility Carsharing](#) [14] has its roots in Switzerland.
4. The Swiss President Doris Leuthard made cleantech one of the top priorities of the country's economic recovery. Almost one billion Swiss francs of the Swiss government stimulus package are targeted towards energy efficiency, renewable energy and the environment. As a result of such heavy investment and friendly government regulation, Leuthard expects the clean technology sector to continue to grow, reaching a volume of 3 trillion Swiss francs worldwide by 2020, double its current size. "This is growth that no government can ignore," she said. Leading the charge towards such productivity are Swiss organizations such as Swiss Cleantech, [Think Swiss](#) [15], [Switzerland Trade and Investment Promotion](#) [16] and the [Embassy of Switzerland](#) [17]. This growth spurt is being trumpeted abroad, and was recently highlighted by Swiss-U.S. Cleantech dialogue events in Atlanta, Washington D.C. and New York. Another such event is planned to take place in Zurich.
5. Today, with a workforce of 160,000 in cleantech—which accounts for 4.5 percent of all employment in the country—Switzerland is a world leader in terms of its innovation potential and research landscape. Switzerland has scored notable successes in the global cleantech arena through multinational manufacturing giants such as [ABB](#) [18] and [Oerlikon Solar](#) [19]. Other standout companies include Geberit, Schulthess Group, Ernst Schweizer Metallbau, Walter Meier, Hoval, Landis&Gyr, TRITEC and Renggli.
6. The Swiss Minenergie is one of the world's most advanced green building rating systems. The Minenergie standard is a quality label for new and refurbished homes for low energy consumption buildings. So far, 15,000 Minergie certifications have been distributed compared to 2,000 LEED certifications in the U.S. The Swiss embassy in Washington, D.C., is currently being renovated as a sustainability an Minergie reference project. The goal is to showcase the key Swiss firms that are supplying the key components for the renovation. Other large corporate buildings that are being designed, constructed or renovated to attain Minenergie certification include Coop and Migros, IKEA, Swiss Re and Zurich Cantonal Bank.
7. The 2000-watt society is a vision—originated by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zürich at the end of 1998—that seeks to cut energy use in the developed world. Specifically, the goal is that each person in the developed world would cut their overall rate of energy use to an average of no more than 2,000 watts by the year 2050—and this is to be done without lowering their standard of living. While the goal has been met with some skepticism as to its viability, the concept is well supported nationally. Recently, 70 percent of the population in Zurich voted in support of putting the 2000-watt concept into practice.
8. Swiss get their own neighborhood in [Masdar City, Abu Dhabi](#) [20], called the Swiss Village. Nick Beglinger, SVA President said Eco-City is another example of the close ties between the two countries. It also speaks to a shared sustainability vision. "The relationship between Switzerland and Abu Dhabi is excellent," Beglinger said. "Swiss Village is an important element of that relationship. We now have a concrete link into the Masdar project, and a platform representing Swiss companies of all types and sizes. SVA offers the possibility to generate exports and to secure one of the most attractive company locations in the Gulf. Swiss firms can act as a community, strengthening each other in terms of know-how and joint offerings."
9. Switzerland runs on hydroelectric power! Hydroelectric power accounts for about 58 percent of Switzerland's electricity production. Another 10 percent of electric power production comes from recycling programs. As a country, Switzerland does not use fossil fuel for electricity production anymore.
10. Swiss Innovations. Switzerland is a small country inhabited by only 7.4 million people. The economy is based on the production of individual goods and services of high quality, such as precision instruments, which is an excellent backdrop for a growing Cleantech economy. "One Third of our portfolio companies are located here in Switzerland", adds Jürgen F. Habichler, Founder and Managing Partner of Zurich based Growth Capital Fund Mountain Cleantech AG, "the Swiss combine entrepreneurial skills with technical expertise". Other exciting Swiss Cleantech companies include [Myclimate](#) [21], [Geroco](#) [22], [Nolaris](#) [23], [Flisom](#) [24], [TEXX](#) [25], Flexcell, [Airlight Energy](#) [26], [EdiSunPower](#), [27] and [Smixin](#).

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