

## **Switzerland to be top in cleantech in the Gulf**

*Abu Dhabi, 18 January 2010* – The Swiss Business Council has launched an Environmental Committee in October 2009. Its main aim is to position Switzerland as a country with a long tradition and expertise in environmental conservation, *says its Chairman, Till Stoll*. Swiss companies can offer what the Gulf region needs to become greener and cleaner.

**Steffen Klatt:** *Swiss companies aim to form a Swiss Village in the eco city Masdar. Are Swiss companies already active in terms of environmental protection and cleantech in the Emirates?*

**Till Stoll:** They are but it seems that not many players in the local markets know about it. In response, the Swiss Business Council, the official representation of Swiss companies in the UAE, started an Environmental Committee in October 2009. Our aim is to position Switzerland as an environmentally innovative and progressive country in the region. The problem we noticed is that the local market does not recognize Swiss companies as the top providers of cleantech products and services.

**Steffen Klatt:** *What is the committee doing?*

**Till Stoll:** As a first step, we focus on continuous education in environmental topics. Everybody in the UAE is “green” right now. This is great. But we realized that most people do not really know what the main environmental issues are. When you ask someone why it is important to have rain forests or healthy rivers, they usually tell you something which sounds good but hardly makes sense. The basic links between the water sprinkler in the garden and the quality of the sea water in the Gulf are not known. We see the greatest potential in showing them what “clean” and “green” is all about and that we don’t need magic to protect the environment. We want to start with basic explanations: What is carbon emission? What is biodiversity? Why do we need to recycle? Why do we face water shortages? When people do not know why they should recycle paper or save water, then it does not make sense to tell them how they can do it.

**Steffen Klatt:** *Who are your partners in the Emirates?*

**Till Stoll:** The drivers of our environmental program are the two Business Councils in Dubai and Abu Dhabi and the Swiss Business Hub in Dubai. The Business Hub is the direct link to Osec and together with the support of the Consulate General in Dubai and the Swiss Embassy in Abu Dhabi it makes our efforts a truly Swiss initiative. Our key partners in the various other areas such as content development, design and financial support for the Swiss environmental education program are the members of the two business councils. We are very fortunate to have an enormously deep resource of environmental expertise among the Swiss companies based in the Emirates. Even in the early stages of our initiative, we received great interest from the member companies. This active support will make our initiative meaningful and beneficial to all of us.

**Steffen Klatt:** *Do you restrict your activities to the Emirates?*

**Till Stoll:** Not at all. The Middle East has various characteristics which are common to all countries in the region. The important ones for our initiative are the similar environmental problems in the individual countries and the same language. In addition, the Swiss Business Hub in Dubai is responsible for all GCC countries which facilitates the distribution of our product within the entire region. We had meetings with several governmental organizations in the Emirates that are more than happy to be part of a GCC wide initiative. One organization representing 420 cities in the Middle East is extremely keen to be connected to this Swiss venture. So I believe that our initiative has great potential to position Swiss knowledge and expertise with respect to environmental conservation in the entire Middle Eastern region.

**Steffen Klatt:** *Which additional value do Swiss companies have to offer?*

**Till Stoll:** Positioning Switzerland as an innovative expert hub for environmental conservation will create the reputation needed for Swiss companies. This is especially interesting for cleantech companies in Switzerland. When we look at cleantech business in the region, we realized that often German companies win contracts. Why? Because they were able to transfer their traditional engineering reputation into the cleantech sector. Hardly anyone here knows about Switzerland's environmental services and its cleantech companies. Osec launched a Swiss cleantech export platform in October 2009. But if Switzerland wants to export successfully, then the local markets need to know what they can expect from cleantech products and services offered by Swiss companies. They need to know that Switzerland is top of the list when it comes to environmental issues and that our companies offer the highest quality. This is the key reason why we started our initiative.

**Steffen Klatt:** *You are a Swiss entrepreneur in the Emirates. Your company Green Destinations designs green buildings according to local needs. How can buildings in the UAE be more resource efficient?*

**Till Stoll:** A Municipality official told me once that they installed a green roof on their building. He was extremely happy to say that they have now a "green building". This shows that we are at the very beginning of ecological construction in the UAE. The obvious solution to make buildings in the UAE more resource efficient is insulation. Most buildings here have hardly any insulation. When we started four years ago, Green Destinations was the first green property developer in the region. A large part of our work has been to convince clients to invest into higher quality structures including the right insulation and clean building technology. It was rather difficult at the beginning but now we get projects across the entire Gulf region and increasingly in Africa through our new office in Johannesburg. The thinking is certainly changing and clients start seeing the benefits of proper sustainable construction.

*Steffen Klatt*

**Short Bio:** Till Stoll started Green Destinations in Dubai four years ago. The Swiss national studied economics at Oxford University and taught at Harvard, before working for the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and Environmental Department of the World Bank. He is the Chairman of the Environmental Committee of the Swiss Business Council in Dubai and an official expert for Osec in cleantech and sustainable construction issues.