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Uruguay's Energy Transition: A Model of Sovereignty and Community-Led Decarbonization

Uruguay has become a global case study in rapid, equitable decarbonization—now generating **up to 98% of its electricity from renewable sources**. As the article notes, the country "*broke free of its dependence on oil imports and carbon emitting power generation*" by pairing state ownership of the grid with private investment in infrastructure.

A Strategic Pivot to Energy Sovereignty

Beginning in the mid-2000s, Uruguay faced recurring droughts, costly oil imports, and rising energy insecurity. In response, the government adopted a 25-year diversification strategy and empowered physicist Ramón Mendéz Galain to design a national transition plan. His proposal reframed renewables not as climate policy but as a national imperative for cheap, reliable domestic energy.

A unified political narrative helped build cross-party consensus—an essential ingredient in sustaining long-term infrastructure change.

The Policy Architecture Behind the Shift

Several structural advantages enabled Uruguay's success:

- **State-controlled utility (UTE):** As the article highlights, UTE was "*aligned with the interest of the Uruguayan people*," enabling coordinated planning without private-sector resistance.
- **Competitive Power Purchase Agreements:** Long-term, dollar-denominated PPAs attracted global investors while ensuring the state retained control of distribution.
- **Labour integration:** Early engagement with unions and retraining programs helped create an estimated 50,000 jobs and avoided backlash from fossil-fuel workers.

Why Uruguay's Model Isn't Easily Replicated

While Mendéz promotes the framework internationally, the article stresses that Uruguay benefited from unique enabling conditions: strong institutions, social trust, favourable geography, and an existing state-run grid. These factors are not guaranteed in many developing countries.

The article also contrasts Uruguay's inclusive approach with examples where renewable projects have led to "*land and water grabs*" or the marginalization of Indigenous and rural communities.

Key Takeaway for Policymakers

Uruguay demonstrates that rapid decarbonization is possible when:

- the state maintains strategic control of the grid,
- private capital is de-risked but not given ownership of national energy assets,
- labour and communities are engaged early, and
- political consensus is built around energy sovereignty rather than climate rhetoric alone.

The broader lesson: technical transitions succeed when they are also social and political transitions. As the article concludes, Uruguay's achievement reflects "*the power of unified political support for energy sovereignty and the state's appreciation for the rights of its people*."

***This article was original published by earth.org and has been condensed by AI to bring out major points of article. Full article: https://earth.org/the-uruguay-way-achieving-energy-sovereignty-in-the-developing-world/*

Graphene Kills Harmful Bacteria “superbugs” but spares human cells

Scientists have uncovered how graphene oxide pulls off a remarkable trick: it hunts down and destroys harmful bacteria while leaving human cells completely unharmed. By targeting a molecule found only in bacterial membranes, this ultra-thin carbon-based material acts with laser-like precision—offering a powerful new alternative to traditional antibiotics. Even more exciting, it works against drug-resistant “superbugs,” promotes faster wound healing, and keeps its antibacterial strength even after repeated washing.

Hygiene is essential for everyday items that come into close contact with the body, including clothing, masks, and toothbrushes. Scientists have now uncovered how graphene can selectively eliminate bacteria while leaving human cells unharmed. This discovery points to a new class of antibacterial materials that could be both safe for people and capable of reducing reliance on traditional antibiotics.

Recently, KAIST announced that a collaborative research team led by Professor Sang Ouk Kim from the Department of Materials Science and Engineering and Professor Hyun Jung Chung from the Department of Biological Sciences identified the mechanism behind the antibacterial properties of Graphene Oxide (GO). This material consists of a single atomic layer of carbon with oxygen groups attached, giving it the ability to disperse well in water and perform a range of functions.

Until now, scientists did not fully understand how graphene achieved its antibacterial effects. This study provides clear molecular-level evidence explaining how the material works.

Selective Antibacterial Action Explained

The researchers found that graphene oxide carries out what they describe as "selective antibacterial action." It attaches to and disrupts the membranes of bacteria while leaving human cells unaffected. The process is similar to how a magnet only sticks to certain metals.

This selectivity comes from oxygen-containing groups on the surface of graphene oxide. These groups bind specifically to a molecule called POPG, which is found in bacterial cell membranes but not in human cells. In simple terms, graphene oxide identifies a unique feature of bacteria, attaches to it, and breaks down the cell structure. Phospholipids make up the membrane surrounding cells, and POPG is a type mainly present in bacteria.

Effective Against Superbugs and Promotes Healing

When applied in nanofiber form, this material was able to stop the growth of a wide range of harmful bacteria, including antibiotic-resistant superbugs. Tests in animals also showed that it helped wounds heal more quickly without causing inflammation.

Another advantage is durability. Fibers made with graphene oxide retained their antibacterial properties even after repeated washing, suggesting strong potential for use in clothing, medical fabrics, and other practical applications.

From Lab Discovery to Real-World Products

This technology is already being used in consumer products. A graphene antibacterial toothbrush developed through patents from the faculty-led startup 'Materials Creation Co., Ltd.,' has sold more than 10 million units, demonstrating strong commercial success. In addition, GrapheneTex, a textile materiala incorporating this technology, was used in uniforms worn by the Taekwondo demonstration team at the 2024 Paris Olympics. It is also expected to appear in functional sportswear at major upcoming events such as the 2026 Asian Games.

Expanding Applications Beyond Clothing

Professor Sang Ouk Kim explained, "This study is an example of scientifically uncovering why graphene can selectively kill bacteria while remaining safe for the human body." He added, "By utilizing this principle, we can expand beyond safe clothing without harsh chemicals to an infinite range of applications, including wearable devices and medical textile systems."

Source: The Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) - extract

www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2026/04/260424233210.htm

US announces it will pay French energy Giant TotalEnergies $1billion to top offshore wind projects

As the widening conflict in the Middle East drives up global oil and gas prices, the US has announced it will pay French energy giant TotalEnergies nearly $1 billion to drop two offshore wind projects in the country.

In an unusual move, the Interior Department announced on Monday that it will reimburse TotalEnergies $928 million, the sum the multinational paid the Biden administration for leases in federal waters to build offshore wind farms off New York and North Carolina. TotalEnergies, one of the world's top six "supermajor" oil companies and one of the 20 largest historical emitters of planet-warming greenhouse gases, promised in turn to reinvest that money in oil and gas projects in the US, including in Texas.

"They don't like us to develop this offshore wind concession because they have some national security concerns. Not up to me to decide yes or no," TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanné told CNBC.

The Trump administration cited undisclosed national security concerns when it ordered five other wind farms along the East Coast to halt construction in December. Federal judges have since weighed in, dismissing the administration's national security claims and ordering construction to resume. One judge called the suspension "arbitrary and capricious."

Lena Moffitt, Executive Director of Evergreen Action, a climate advocacy group, called the new deal "a taxpayer-funded bribe to kill homegrown clean energy and hand the money straight to oil and gas executives." Anne Jellema, Chief Executive of the campaign group 350.org described it as a "handout to polluters" and an "insult to every American household that the government is funneling billions in public funds into the pockets of the oil and gas industry while citizens are being crushed by record-high utility costs."

The deal comes as US-Israeli attacks on Iran, which unleashed a wider conflict in the Middle East, triggered the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market, fueling the world's worst global energy crisis.

"I suspect that the DOI will do other deals with other companies, so maybe we are the first to open the door, but it's a matter of win-win situation," Pouyanné said, adding that investing in gas projects is part of TotalEnergies' strategy.

TotalEnergies in Court

TotalEnergies is embroiled in lawsuits in Europe for its contribution to global warming. In one, a coalition of French local authorities alongside five local civil society organizations are challenging the company's continued expansion of oil and gas production despite extensive and indisputable scientific evidence of their impact on global climate. Despite positioning itself as a "major player in the energy transition," TotalEnergies has plans to increase its hydrocarbon production by 3% per year until 2030, with at least two-thirds of its investments in fossil fuels. A verdict is expected on June 25.

Separately, a Belgian farmer sued TotalEnergies two years ago to seek compensation for the damage that numerous extreme weather events, which he says are a direct result of the company's activities, caused to his farm. A verdict initially expected last week, was postponed until September 9 as the court said it wanted to wait for the judgment in the French case.

Last year, a French court found that TotalEnergies misled consumers regarding its climate commitments, marking the first time a court has held an oil and gas company liable for greenwashing.

Source: Earth.org Martina Igini 25 March 2026