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N.Y. wind energy corruption probe reaches Vermont

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MONTPELIER – New York's far-reaching investigation into allegations that wind developers paid local officials to approve their energy projects moved into the state of Vermont this week.

New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo announced Wednesday that his office issued a subpoena to Reunion Power, a wind energy developer with offices in Manchester Center and Hackensack, N.J., as part of its ongoing investigation.

Announced last summer, the investigation alleges that wind executives at several companies received land-use agreements for their projects from public officials and residents using cash bribes and other illegal gifts.

It's not clear whether Reunion Power, which has proposed wind projects in three New York counties, is also accused of that type of wrongdoing. The press release from Cuomo's office Wednesday only said the subpoena was issued as part of the "investigation into allegations of misconduct."

The company, which does not have any active wind projects in development in Vermont, denied any wrongdoing in a statement released Thursday. Steve Eisenberg, the company's managing director, said Reunion Power has "nothing to hide."

"Reunion Power is proud of how we develop wind farms and that we perform by the books at all times," he said in a prepared statement.

The announcement that Reunion Power was subpoenaed as part of the investigation came the same day that Cuomo's office announced that 16 companies had signed onto a code of ethics for the wind industry to combat any further alleged abuses.

His office said early Wednesday that Reunion Power was the only company not to sign onto the code. A release from his office later that day said the company had changed course and signed onto the pledge.

"New York must be equally committed to clean energy and clean government," Cuomo said. "The companies that have signed onto our Wind Industry Ethics Code are echoing that commitment – and I commend them for that."

Cuomo's office did not return a call for comment Thursday and a representative of the Vermont Attorney General's Office said they were not involved in the investigation.

A statement from Reunion Power released Thursday stated that the company signed onto an earlier ethics code released by the attorney general's office and did not know about the new code until after Cuomo's office issued a press release about it.

"Our company is one of the smallest of all the wind power developers in (New York)," read the statement. "Perhaps that is why no one notified us prior to the announcement of the final ethic code being enacted. We would have appreciated more direct communication, as it would have prevented Reunion Power as being singled out and used as an example."

Cuomo's investigation centers on at least two wind companies – First Wind of Massachusetts (formerly known as UPC Wind, a company that has worked on projects in Vermont) and Noble Environmental Power LLC of Connecticut.

According to statements from Cuomo's office, the companies are accused of attempting to acquire the necessary land permit approvals for several high-profile wind projects in New York by bribing public officials and also engaging in anti-competitive business practices.

The scandal has rocked the green-energy community and provided fodder for anti-wind activists who worry about the effect large-scale windmills have on the environment, especially scenic views.

Jodi Hall, the treasurer of the organization Cohocton Wind Watch, a group that is battling First Wind's plans for projects in that part of the state, said the emergence of Reunion Power in the investigation was a surprise.

She said the company has several projects in development, but believed that

they had been delayed for several years.

"This is brand-new information for us," Hall said. "And it's not clear right now if this is because they would not sign the code of ethics or because they are targets now of the investigation."

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