THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO
Global Energy Attribute Certificates
for Commercial, Industrial, and Institutional Buyers
Renewable electricity purchasing in the commercial, industrial, and institutional sector (C&I) has exploded, bolstered by rapidly falling prices and improvements in technology. NGO mandates, such as the Scope 2 protocol, have further driven market development around the world.

This Guide will provide you with helpful direction on global Energy Attribute Certificates (EACs), one of the most commonly used, and widely accepted, forms of renewable electricity purchasing worldwide, and a key component of any integrated clean energy strategy.
SECTION HIGHLIGHTS
Understanding Renewable Electricity & EACs

• Most C&I purchasers will use at least some volume of EACs at some point in their renewable energy journey. They are easy to obtain and highly credible when purchased from the right source.

• EACs represent the “proof” of clean, carbon-free generation and can be used by C&I buyers to meet renewable energy purchasing goals, greenhouse gas reduction targets, and Scope 2 disclosure.

• All buyers in the US, Australia, Europe and many other locations that wish to make green power claims to clean generation must own EACs. This is true of C&I buyers using offsite PPAs, onsite distributed generation, utility green power programs, or simply the EACs themselves. In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) regulates these claims, and C&I buyers making claims without associated EACs can run afoul of the FTC guidance. In other countries, buyers must be aware of similar governmental mandates.
Three Ways to Use Renewable Electricity

Option #1: Offsite Power Purchase Agreements

Large-scale renewable energy projects that are not physically collocated with the purchaser’s facilities are referred to as offsite. The predominant way that buyers purchase renewable electricity from these projects is via a power purchase agreement (PPA), which locks in a fixed price for power with the project owner over a specified duration.

PPAs have received considerable attention over the past several years from C&I buyers, as they allow these large users of electricity to purchase renewables at considerable scale. For many C&I buyers, though, an offsite PPA is not within reach. Generally, this is due to the buyer’s creditworthiness or energy load size (although smaller PPA tranches, via aggregation plays/syndicates, are rapidly becoming more available).

Option #2: Onsite Power Purchase Agreements/Distributed Generation

Another common form of renewable electricity purchasing is via onsite installation, generally solar photovoltaics (PV). This mechanism is particularly attractive to buyers with many decentralized centers of operations (such as retailers, banks, fast food chains, etc.) or a large rooftop footprint (although ground-mounted PV is also used by C&I organizations).

Onsite projects are not for every C&I buyer. There can be siting concerns, capital expenditure constraints, or operational risk that buyers may choose to bypass. In addition, most C&I purchasers won’t be able to use onsite generation to achieve more than a fraction of their overall electricity demand due to the smaller scale of these projects.

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1. While this is the case in locations such as the US and Mexico, in certain locations, such as states within India, opportunities for PPAs at a smaller scale may exist.
2. For more on offsite PPAs, download our white paper *Accelerate Your Energy Strategy with PPAs*.
3. For more on how onsite renewables can help insulate a company from policy and legislative changes, visit [http://www.renewablechoice.com/blog-onsite-renewables-advantages/](http://www.renewablechoice.com/blog-onsite-renewables-advantages/)
Option #3: Energy Attribute Certificates

The generation and distribution of renewable electricity is a complicated process. As renewables are sold onto the electric grid in the spot market, it is nearly impossible to trace them. To compensate, in 1999, projects in the state of California began producing a certificate of generation to accompany renewable electricity supply. These “birth certificates” are known as renewable energy credits (RECs) and have become the standard method for tracking and trading renewable electricity around the world.

RECs are used in both compliance (regulated) markets and by voluntary purchasers to achieve their goals. They can be bundled with retail electricity via green utility purchasing programs or “unbundled” and sold as a separate commodity.

Over time, with the development of new global markets, a variety of certificates have been created. The term Energy Attribute Certificate (EAC) refers to this class of established and emerging green power commodities, regardless of the country of origin. We’ll explore each type of currently available EAC in the remaining sections of this guide.
EACs have a relatively low barrier of entry for most C&I purchasers. EACs are easy to obtain, represent zero carbon electricity generation, and—when sourced from a reputable provider and third-party certified—are highly reliable. Most renewable electricity purchasers will, at one point, use some volume of EACs to meet their goals.

It can be difficult for organizations to fully realize their goal using one solution or technology; we recommend a portfolio approach that ramps to the final goal.
SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

Why EACs Matter: Credible Claims and the Scope 2 Protocol

C&I buyers purchase renewable electricity to meet a variety of goals. Most commonly, these include:

• **Saving money**: Rapidly falling costs and fixed-price contracting make renewable electricity attractive for hedging against future economic and environmental risks.

• **Competitive pressure**: NGOs, consumers, and industry peers continue to push C&I buyers to adopt clean energy.

• **Regulation/legislation**: Depending on geographic location, buyers may be required to source a portion of their electricity from renewable sources. These requirements can differ dramatically depending on individual country mandate and various reporting & disclosure guidelines.

• **Environmental and social responsibility**: C&I buyers increasingly realize the importance of moving to clean, renewable electricity as a means to reduce pollution, to increase reliance on domestic sources of energy production, and to mitigate present and future carbon risk.
Another predominant goal for large C&I buyers is reporting and disclosure. Increasingly, C&I organizations are expected to disclose their environmental impact across a variety of metrics, including greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption, and climate action targets.

In 2015, the World Resources Institute (WRI) and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), two leading NGOs on environmental impact quantification, issued guidance on Scope 2 emissions, which are greenhouse gases resulting from electricity generation. Entities that report/discard their emissions must now report on both a location-basis and a market-basis.

With the goal of creating greater transparency, location-based reporting mandates that organizations disclose their actual geographic, operational electricity consumption. Market-based reporting requires that organizations share the tools they are using—known in the guidance as contractual instruments—to address the emissions from this electricity consumption. Organizations must match location-based electricity consumption with market-based contractual instruments, meaning that these instruments must be located in the same electrical grid as the electricity consumption itself.

_Market-Based Emissions Hierarchy by Contractual Instrument*

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<th>Contractual Instrument</th>
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<td>EACs (unbundled, bundled, contracted, or utility-provided)</td>
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<td>• GOs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Contracts bundled with EACs (e.g. PPAs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contracts for electricity (such as PPAs) where EACs do not exist</td>
<td>• Power contracts that do not specify attributes, but there are clearly attributes available that have not been tracked or claimed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplier/Utility emission rates (such as a tariff) that are disclosed</td>
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<td>Other grid-average emission factors</td>
<td>• Total emission rates of specific grid-region</td>
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*Derived from emissions factor Table 6.3 in the GHG Protocol Scope 2 Guidance, available from [www.ghgprotocol.org](http://www.ghgprotocol.org).*
Understanding this reporting mechanism is salient to a review of EACs because these certificates embody the actual attributes of clean generation. When clean power is created, the electrons themselves join the electrical grid, which is supplied by a “soup” of generation sources ranging from coal to wind power. Once intermingled with the grid, it is impossible to separate clean generation from any other source.

The REC was the tool invented to track this generation. As the birth certificate of clean power, it provides the “proof” that the electricity is from a renewable source. Indeed, it is the REC (or other EAC) that contains and conveys the low-carbon benefits, or environmental attributes, of that power. Without a birth certificate, clean generation is merely electrons.

For electricity to be considered clean generation—and to make reporting claims on the basis of this consideration—the actual energy must be paired, or bundled, with an equivalent volume of EACs. As a result, EACs underlie every Scope 2 contractual instrument. Whether an offsite power purchase agreement or an onsite distributed generation system, buyers that wish to use their purchase towards CDP reporting, DJSI reporting, GRI reporting, or clean energy marketing claims must own EACs. This is true whether the buyer is a C&I, a homeowner, or a utility.

CASE STUDY

Intel

Since 2008, Intel has been the largest voluntary purchaser of green power in the United States, buying 3.1 billion kWh of RECs annually to complement 100% of the company’s purchased electricity. The RECs are part of Intel’s integrated global energy strategy, which also includes the use of onsite solar PV and micro wind turbines, electric vehicles, solar thermal water heating, and onsite lithium-ion storage.
EACs are a powerful contractual instrument in their own right. As they are generated in a 1:1 ratio, they convey all the attributes of clean generation, regardless of source, technology, geography, or even (in some cases) project online date. EACs are the only instruments that C&I buyers can use, by themselves, to reach 100% renewable energy goals.

For many C&I buyers, however, a secondary claim—additionality—is an important consideration when purchasing renewable electricity. Additionality is the concept that “but for my action, this would not have occurred”. In the case of large-scale renewable electricity, a C&I’s involvement in a project may make the difference between that project coming online or not. This is additionality.

CASE STUDY

Digital Realty

Urged by its customers to provide carbon-free computing in its virtual and physical data centers, Digital Realty developed an innovative strategy known as the Clean Start program. The company purchases RECs on behalf of its digital space leasees and then retires these RECs, allowing clients to use the retired RECs to make their own reporting claims. The program has increased by more than 3x in a single year. Digital Realty has also executed a virtual wind PPA to provide additional, clean energy to its facilities where leasees of physical data center hosting space can also take advantage of renewables.
Additionality has received attention in recent years because additional projects have the potential to displace carbon emissions and make a real impact on mitigating global warming and its associated risks. EAC products in some markets are obtained from existing projects that cannot make claim to carbon displacement. In other markets, the price for EACs has become so low that the purchase of these attributes does not provide a significant source of funding for new projects (another means of achieving additionality).

However, EAC additionality claims are not universal. For example, in some regions of the United States where states have aggressive renewable energy targets (typically known as renewable portfolio standards, or RPS), RECs can be highly additional because of competitive market pressure. The same is true in many global markets where EAC trading schemes are emergent but there is high customer demand. Like electricity itself, EACs are a commodity, and subject to the volatility of the free market. Even today’s low-priced Texas RECs could swing in price, depending on supply, demand, and consumer perception.

EACs are how we’re creating demand in order to increase the size of the renewable energy market.

– Natasha Tuck, VMware

### Contractual Instruments

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<th>Contractual Instruments</th>
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**KEY**
- 🟢 Requires consideration
- 🟢 Readily meets goals
SECTION HIGHLIGHTS
Specific EACs, Their Availability, and Their Value

- **EACs are increasingly available across the globe to meet the growing demand of compliance and voluntary markets.**

- **These instruments convey the environmental attributes of clean generation regardless of the market in which they are developed, and in many cases, lead to C&I buyers making zero carbon claims in the geographic regions where EAC markets exist.**

- **Buyers must use caution when transacting in emerging markets**, as not all markets are compliant with the global verification standards that audit chain of custody concerns such as double-counting and double-claiming. C&I organizations should consult an advisor like Renewable Choice Energy - Schneider Electric for the most up-to-date market information in regions outside the U.S. and E.U.

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5. Learn more about the importance of credible EAC markets at [http://www.renewablechoice.com/blog-international-eacs-fact-check/](http://www.renewablechoice.com/blog-international-eacs-fact-check/)
Renewable Energy Credits or Certificates (RECs)

RECs are the most common of the EACs. Originating in the United States, they are available throughout North America and in many global markets to track and trade green power. RECs verify that one megawatt-hour (MWh) of renewable electricity was generated, and, as we’ve reviewed, embody the environmental attributes of that clean generation. When a North American green power facility, such as a wind farm, produces one MWh of electricity and adds it to the power grid, they also generate a corresponding REC in a 1:1 ratio.

RECs are a tradable commodity distinct from the wholesale electricity itself and represent the positive environmental attributes of the clean generation that has been added to the grid. In order to claim the use of green power, an entity must bundle RECs with purchased electricity. If you have ownership of RECs corresponding to the amount of grid-sourced electricity you consume, you can be assured that at least that much power was generated at a renewable facility and added back to the power grid.

In the U.S., use of RECs by C&I buyers remains voluntary, as there is currently no federal cap-and-trade scheme or other compulsory mechanism (although this is subject to evolution over time as the legislative environment changes). RECs are also used in compliance markets by utilities to meet individual state RPS or other renewable electricity goals, which exist in 37 states and the District of Columbia. State RPS goals are becoming increasingly aggressive, which has the potential to increase the competitive market for RECs.

RECs have come under scrutiny from a variety of sources because of their inability to fully convey additionality, and because the ways renewable electricity can be used are widely misunderstood. However, when verified by a third-party, such as the Center for Resource Solutions Green-e® Energy program, RECs are a highly reliable and credible way to indirectly use clean electricity, and they remain the only way to take ownership of the environmental attributes of that electricity. RECs are endorsed and used by thousands of organizations around the world, including the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and some of the largest Global 500 companies.6

RECs have also played, and continue to play, a critical role in driving renewable energy market development. They were the first way that organizations were able to make a choice about the type of electricity they were consuming, and they remain a free market instrument that enables buyers to make credible environmental claims about their electricity use.

6. For more on the distinction between EACs and additionality, download our white paper.
RECs (and other EACs) also create demand signals in nascent markets that move governments and utilities to act. As a result, REC markets drive new project development, and, over time, enable consumer confidence, which leads to innovative technology development and contracting mechanisms including PPAs.

**RECs offer a myriad of benefits to the C&I buyer:**

- All clean technologies (wind, solar, hydro, geothermal, biomass/biogas, tidal) generate RECs, giving the buyer considerable choice when it comes to the type of technology they choose and the story they tell.

- In interconnected grid regions, like the United States, RECs can be obtained and used anywhere within the grid—including regulated states. This gives buyers the flexibility to make decisions about price and geography that may be inhibited when considering either offsite or onsite renewables.

- As a result of this grid interconnectedness, RECs in the U.S. can be arbitrated or “swapped.” This is an attractive option to offsite PPA buyers, in particular, who may possess RECs from a project in a highly competed price region. They can, in turn, sell these RECs into the open commodities market and backfill their own PPA with lower priced RECs from an oversupplied region.

- RECs can be very affordable, which enables a greater number of C&I market participants to source green power to meet their environmental goals. They can also be purchased in any volume and for any duration, which offers flexibility to the C&I buyer.

- All RECs convey the same benefits of clean energy generation, including zero carbon emissions, reduced air pollution, and domestic energy security, regardless of price, source, or location.
Guarantees of Origin

Environmental attributes are not confined to North America; there are established and emerging EAC markets all over the world. One of the oldest and most predominant is the E.U.’s.

In 2009, the E.U. issued Directive 2009/28/EC, which mandates a minimum 20% renewable energy usage throughout the region, pooled across the various E.U. member states (including the U.K.). The Directive also defined Guarantees of Origin (GOs) under article 15, which are the E.U. equivalent of RECs.

Like RECs, GOs are used to verify that one MWh of renewable electricity was generated by a clean power facility and added to the electric grid. GOs are created in a 1:1 ratio with renewable generation, are used to track and trade renewable electricity, and become the “proof” of that generation. (A Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin, or REGO, is the U.K. equivalent).

GOs and REGOs are internationally tracked and traded via the Association of Issuing Bodies (AIB) and standardized under the AIB’s European Energy Certificate System (EECS).

While not interchangeable with North American RECs, GOs can be used to address C&I operational electricity consumption throughout the E.U. interconnected region. Similar to North America—where RECs from one state can address load in another state—GOs and REGOs from one E.U. member state can be used for load in another E.U. member state, allowing C&I purchasers to meet their environmental and reporting goals throughout the region, regardless of the location of their E.U. operational facilities.7

It’s also important for buyers to understand that GOs are part of a European tracking system that does not convey additionality (unlike some other global EAC products). GOs are also often obtained from large Nordic hydro projects. Large-scale hydro, while renewable, can often have other detrimental side effects (such as ecological disruption) that are less desirable to many buyers. We encourage buyers that are interested in GOs to weigh their overall objectives before purchasing them, and to seek advice on the myriad of options available to avoid these impacts.

7. Renewable Choice Energy was the first U.S.-based advisor to register with RECs International, the administrator of the cross-border attribute tracking system in the E.U.
International RECs (I-RECs)

Similar to a REC in North America or a GO in the E.U., an I-REC verifies that one MWh of renewable electricity was generated by a clean power facility and added to the electric grid. I-RECs are used by organizations in many markets to meet environmental, reporting, or regulatory goals.

In early 2016, the I-REC Standard became the first organization to offer I-RECs compliant with the Scope 2 guidance and accepted by reporting agencies, such as CDP, in markets including China and India. The I-REC standard guarantees that the attributes purchased from a renewable electricity facility are not double-counted, double-issued, or double-claimed. It also offers a public registry to track the product through the chain of custody from generation to retirement, similar to the role of the Green-e Energy program in North America. As a result of the I-REC standard, organizations now have an accepted option for purchasing credible EACs in multiple global locations.8

8. Like GOs, I-RECs are part of a tracking system that in and of itself does not convey additionality.
**GoldPower®**

Like I-RECs, GoldPower is an EAC product designed for global markets and available in a large and growing number of countries where established national EAC schemes do not yet exist. While I-RECs were designed as a mechanism for tracking verified renewable electricity generation and ownership of the electricity’s environmental attributes, GoldPower was designed to actively support the uptake of new renewable energy.

GoldPower has a number of quality features that I-RECs lack, including that elusive additionality. Other GoldPower benefits include social and environmental safeguards; verified and ongoing benefits to local communities and environments; a maximum plant age; requirements to use recent-vintage generation; strong transparency standards; and an annual audit of suppliers and transactions similar to Green-e’s.

**TIGRs**

The most recent addition to the international EAC marketplace is the Tradeable Instrument for Global Renewables, or TIGR. Launched in 2016 by APX, a highly regarded, global clean tech registry, a TIGR verifies that one MWh of renewable electricity was generated by a clean power facility and added to the electric grid. APX is a long-standing pioneer of registry technologies around the world, and they support prominent North American compliance markets with trusted partners and tracking systems, making TIGRs a highly credible form of EAC. They are supported by strict due diligence measures and developers and projects are vetted closely to ensure their validity.

The creation of the TIGR product was initially inspired by a solar PPA that Apple Inc. executed in Singapore in 2015. TIGRs are currently available in Singapore, the Philippines, India, and the United States, with planned expansion to China, Japan, the Middle East, South Africa, and parts of South America coming soon.9

**Other EAC Types**

There are other EACs available in a variety of emerging markets, including Mexican CELs, South African zaRECs, Australian GreenPower and Large-scale Generation Certificates (LGCs), and Japanese Green Power Certificates. These markets are predominantly in development, focused on compliance needs, or extremely high priced for the average C&I buyer. However, market dynamics can change rapidly, so require continuous monitoring.

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9. The TIGR registry has been active since September 1, 2016. Renewable Choice Energy became the first registered marketer for TIGRS as a retail EAC provider on September 2, 2016.

**CASE STUDY**

**Microsoft**

Microsoft has long been a leader on clean energy. The company was one of the first to execute an offsite PPA, a project that was partially funded by an internal carbon fee. The company also purchases a wide array of global EACs in order to reduce both its domestic and international carbon footprint and achieve its environmental goals, earning Microsoft a top spot in the U.S. EPA’s Green Power Partnership.
The Value of Global EACs

As globalization continues to expand, and as disclosure mandates like the Scope 2 protocol continue to drive the conversation on reporting, C&I buyers look to emerging markets to meet their environmental and economic goals.

EACs play a critical role in market development. Like RECs in North America, EACs enable and empower consumer choice, often in markets where electricity choice is constrained or heavily regulated. But more than that, as a free market instrument, EACs create a powerful demand signal to nascent markets that drives new project development, inspires consumer confidence in the overall validity of the market, and enables buyers to make credible environmental claims in the geographic regions where they do business. This demand, in turn, carries with it a host of valuable co-benefits including reduced air pollution and improved human health outcomes, reduced water withdrawals over conventional fossil generation plants, and economic stimulus and job creation.

Indeed, without a credible EAC market, countries cannot:

- Demonstrate chain-of-custody (possession of environmental attributes, assurance of ownership, and avoidance of double-counting)
- Develop functioning regulatory programs
- Confer right to make claims associated with renewable electricity products from any source

However, a word of caution for C&I purchasers dabbling in global EAC markets. In general, buyers should recognize that significantly different products exist for different markets and regions, and that all EACs do not necessarily possess the same features or attributes. Purchasers with load in these emergent regions are encouraged to work with an advisor like Renewable Choice - Schneider Electric to identify market opportunities and challenges in advance.
The Good News for C&I Buyers

It wasn’t so long ago that C&I buyers were constrained in where and how they sourced their electricity. The U.S. REC market changed that. C&I purchasers now have a wide array of choices when it comes to the geographic location, technology type, and co-benefits of their electricity purchasing.

The good news is that tried-and-true Energy Attribute Certificates remain one of the simplest and most readily available green power options available to all C&I organizations, regardless of size, location, or industry type. Whether used to help C&I organizations meet 100% of their renewable electricity needs, or as a portion of a larger renewable energy portfolio, EACs remain an absolutely crucial part of an integrated renewable electricity strategy, and an underpinning foundation of the entire global renewable energy matrix.

For more than 15 years, Renewable Choice has provided best-in-class renewable energy products and services to C&I buyers. We have advised our clients on more than a gigawatt of new build renewables, and have long-standing relationships with the top wind and solar developers in the country. We consistently negotiate successful win-win contracts for our clients and maintain our reputation as a leading independent, expert advisor. We are pleased to have been acquired by Schneider Electric in 2017, a merger that will help us more rapidly realize our vision of a low-carbon economy. Contact us today to learn more about your renewable energy options and how the combined Renewable Choice Energy-Schneider Electric team can help you achieve your energy and sustainability goals.
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James Lewis leads Renewable Choice Energy’s work in international markets. He has over 10 years of experience in sustainability with a background in sales, marketing, consulting, and research. James has helped clients such as Hilton, Microsoft, UEFA, and WWF achieve their sustainability objectives in markets including the U.K., Switzerland, India, China, and Singapore, together with the development of the international GoldPower REC product with WWF. James has lived and worked in the U.K., Australia, and France, and he is a citizen of both the U.K. and Australia. He has a Masters of Environmental Technology from Imperial College, London.

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