



## COOL TALKS

### The UNEP Cool Coalition Webinar Series

Cool Talks spotlight innovative solutions, policies, and partnerships across the sustainable cooling landscape. From passive cooling and refrigerants to finance, technology, and just access, each session brings together global experts to exchange knowledge, inspire action, and accelerate progress toward a cooler, more resilient future.

---

#### District Cooling as Urban Energy Infrastructure

**Date:** 30 April 2026

**Time:** 15:00 CEST / 09:00 EDT

**Duration:** 60 minutes

[REGISTER HERE](#)

---

#### Background

In cities where cooling already drives peak electricity demand, the focus is on delivering systemic gains in energy performance, grid resilience, and emissions reduction. District cooling sits at that junction. By centralising chilled-water production and distributing it through underground pipe networks, district cooling systems can cut building-level cooling energy consumption by up to 50%, reclaim valuable space for other uses, reduce refrigerant leakage risk, and integrate thermal energy storage to flatten peak power demand.

District cooling as a downtown utility service in cities began in 1962 in Hartford, CT, and was followed by 10 more city systems built by natural gas local distribution companies (LDC's). A second investment surge by electric utilities followed in the 1980's-2000's driven by CFC phaseout and urgent demand reduction on local grids. At the same time, college and university campuses across North America invested in district cooling to enhance reliability and resilience to support research while reducing grid demand to achieve environmental targets.

Since 2000, massive investment in district cooling infrastructure has taken place in the Middle East, particularly in high-density, high-cooling demand cities like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha. Today, with growing concern over extreme heat and urban heat islands as public health issues, city planners, agencies and utilities are turning to district cooling to reduce loads on an over-stressed power grid. With multiple industry projections estimating that the global district cooling market will more than double over the next decade, governments are beginning to embed district cooling targets within



national cooling and demand-side management strategies, designed alongside renewable energy supply and thermal storage.

This Cool Talk will examine district cooling as urban energy infrastructure, strategies for managing smart growth, best practices in operations, policy and regulatory conditions enabling scale, and how district cooling fits within the broader landscape of energy transition planning and national cooling strategies.

## Event Objectives

- Explain the value proposition of district cooling how it fits as a grid-scale energy infrastructure solution.
- Identify technology and design innovations that are expanding district cooling’s applicability and climate performance.
- Examine the policy, regulatory and financial conditions that have enabled district cooling to scale in leading markets, and identify what is needed to replicate that in new geographies.
- Connect district cooling to national cooling action plans and demand-side management strategies as a core implementation pathway.

## Agenda

Time	Item	Speaker
15:00 – 15:10 (10 min)	<b>Opening Remarks</b>	<b>Rob Thornton</b> , President & CEO, International District Energy Association
15:10 – 15:40 (30 min)	<b>Panel Discussion: Industry Outlook and Enabling Conditions</b>	<p><u>Moderator:</u> <b>Meghan Riesterer</b>, Second Vice Chair, Executive Committee, Board of Directors, International District Energy Association</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ahmad Bin Shafar</b>, Chief Executive Office, Empower</li> <li>• <b>Oddgeir Gudmundsson</b>, District Energy Solutions Director, Danfoss</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Sudheer Perla</b>, Senior Advisor, District Cooling, UNEP Cool Coalition</li><li>• <b>Alexander Sharabaroff</b>, Senior Energy Specialist, World Bank</li></ul>
15:40 – 15:55 (15 min)	<b>Q&amp;A</b>	<b>Moderator: Rob Thornton</b> , President & CEO, International District Energy Association
15:55 – 16:00 (5 min)	<b>Closing</b>	<b>Meghan Riesterer</b> , Second Vice Chair, Executive Committee, Board of Directors, International District Energy Association

---