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Milwaukee's water technology, other industries, ripe for collaboration with Israel, diplomat says

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Aviv Ezra, Consulate General of Israel to the Midwest, Israel's highest ranking official in the Midwest, was in Milwaukee Tuesday meeting with a number of business, city and community officials. During his stay, he met with the Milwaukee Business Journal at the Global Water Center in Milwaukee to talk about how Israel is building a water technology bridge to Wisconsin.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

How is Israel working with Wisconsin, and specifically The Water Council, to share innovations for each other's water technology industries?

"The idea is to try to identify challenges that you have here in Milwaukee and try to see if we have solutions in Israel, and vice versa. There's certain challenges we have in Israel that you have solutions to right here. How do you do that? You build a platform. How do you build a platform? You want to find a way to incentivize companies to research together. What we wanted to do is create a platform in which Israel will bring a certain budget and Wisconsin, Milwaukee and The Water Council would bring a certain budget and give these incentives to Israeli and local companies in Milwaukee to tackle certain topics and certain needs that are on the agenda. This beautiful building (Global Water Center) is the platform on the Milwaukee side."



CONSULATE GENERAL OF ISRAEL TO THE MIDWEST

Aviv Ezra, Consulate General of Israel to the Midwest, is Israel's highest ranking official in the Midwest.

So Israeli companies will come here to do research?

"Just recently, there was a call for proposals. There is a \$150,000 research fund from the [Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District](#) and matching funds from the Israeli side. The goal was to secure matching funding to conduct pilot testing of solutions by Israeli water technology companies in Wisconsin. The final proposals will be selected in the third quarter of 2018." **Note:** [Here's more on that partnership](#)

What are the water challenges Israel is facing?

"Israel is facing a drought and has already found two technological matters to combat that. One is drip irrigation systems. The second solution is the desalination of water. We have three plants that are capable of transforming salty water into drinking water. Your next question will be about Milwaukee, because you guys don't have any problems with a drought. Your challenges are different, mostly sewage management and the second topic is purification of water. We have a few companies capable of making a difference in that and they will be hopefully coming here through The Water Council."

Are Israeli companies opening offices in Milwaukee and do you foresee that happening?

"That's the goal. Last year when (Gov. Scott Walker) was in Israel, what he offered through The Water Council is 'we have a great facility, we have opportunity to help you relocate into Wisconsin. Bring your technologies, we have the need, we have the platform and we're going to get the funds.'

"Israeli tech companies can come to the United States and they can come to New York, which can be overwhelming, or to Silicon Valley, which doesn't have any added value for water, or they can also come to Milwaukee where there is the issue of water, challenges with water and this facility that can host them."

Do you find it simple to do business in the U.S. and bring a company here?

"It's very open. The biggest market is here and Israeli companies come here regularly, but they mostly come to the coasts. My goal is to say to Israeli companies 'America isn't just about the coasts.' The heartland of America is the Midwest. From agriculture to water, everything is right here in the middle of America. I'm trying to not just market Israeli companies here, but market Midwest companies back in Israel as potential for growth, investment, development and making business. Consider it an untapped treasure."

Nick Williams

Reporter

Milwaukee Business Journal

