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Solar Power - Featured Article

April 05, 2011

Council Vote 'Green Lights' Solar Power at Sacramento City Hall



By Cheryl Kaften

TMCnet Contributor

Following City Council approval last week, Sacramento—the oldest incorporated city in California—will become a solar energy innovator. The City plans to install 1.9 megawatts—more than 8,000 solar panels—of new solar power capacity at City Hall and three other municipal sites, including the Police Department.

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The panels are expected to be operational by year-end 2011 and to produce approximately 2.6 million kilowatt-hours of solar electricity in the first year. According to [SolarCity](#), the company installing and maintaining the panels, that's enough energy to power about 250 homes.

"This project is a triple win for Sacramento," said Mayor Kevin Johnson. "First, [through the Power Purchase Agreement with SolarCity ([News - Alert](#))], we will save taxpayers money by producing solar power at a rate that is anticipated to be lower than the current cost of grid electricity. Second, it will reduce pollution by generating renewable power. And third, it will create more local jobs to install the panels."

In fact, Dennis Cox ([News - Alert](#)), the regional director for SolarCity, estimated, "The City's new solar projects should help us pass the 100-employee mark in Sacramento this year." The company recently expanded into a new 15,000-square-foot operations center in Sacramento, more than doubling its local facility space. Solar City—named to FastCompany.com's list of "[The 10 Most Innovative Companies in Energy](#)" this year—is currently the leading U.S. installer of rooftop solar panels.

All of these advantages are being realized "largely as a result of

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Sacramento's [participation](#) in a U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) program that is helping 25 cities nationwide to go solar," explained City spokesperson Yvette Rincon.

[DOE's Solar American Cities \(SAC\) program](#), launched in 2007, promotes the mainstream adoption of solar power into city energy planning, zoning and city facilities. Selected through a competitive awards process, these cities each received \$200,000, along with technical assistance from universities, national laboratories, and Denver-based engineering firm [CH2M HILL](#). The technical assistance provides access to national solar experts who help draft power purchase agreements (such as the one that Sacramento is using to reduce energy costs), select photovoltaic panels, and train building code officials.

SAC's technical assistance already has helped create Berkeley, California's [Solar Mapping Portal](#), which went online in April 2009. Using the portal, residents can estimate the solar potential of their rooftops, calculate the square footage needed for solar panels, gather information about available tax rebates, and more.

Cheryl Kaftan is an accomplished communicator who has written for consumer and corporate audiences. She has worked extensively for MasterCard Worldwide, Philip Morris USA (Altria), and KPMG, and has consulted for Estee Lauder and the Philadelphia Inquirer Newspapers. To read more of her articles, please visit her [columnist page](#).

Edited by [Janice McDuffee](#)

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