

## A boom in 'distributed' solar projects

Todd Woody



*Recurrent Energy - An artist's rendering of a ground-level distributed solar installation from Recurrent Energy. Such smaller-scale projects are on the rise.*

As big solar power plants planned for the desert Southwest remain bogged down in environmental disputes, utilities increasingly are turning to so-called distributed solar rooftop arrays and small photovoltaic farms that can be built close to transmission lines.

Over the past few weeks, some 1,300 megawatts' worth of distributed solar deals and initiatives have been announced or approved. At peak output, that is the equivalent of a big nuclear power plant.

Two weeks ago in California, regulators authorized the utility Southern California Edison's program to install 500 megawatts of solar on commercial rooftops. A few days later, they recommended that Pacific Gas and Electric, the dominant utility in Northern California, be given the green light for its own 500-megawatt initiative that aims to install ground-mounted photovoltaic arrays near electrical substations and urban areas.

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District said in January that it took only a week to sell out its 100-megawatt solar program, which offers developers the opportunity to build photovoltaic projects of up to five megawatts.

And last week, the New York Power Authority announced a program to install 100 megawatts of solar arrays around the state.

"All of this is a great indication that solar prices are continuing to get a lot cheaper and that results in scale," said Adam Browning, executive director of Vote Solar, a San Francisco nonprofit that promotes renewable energy.

An oversupply of solar modules and the rise of Chinese companies tapping low-cost manufacturing have pushed prices down, making photovoltaics a more realistic option for utilities to achieve renewable energy mandates, according to analysts.

That was evident in a recent spate of deals. This week, Recurrent Energy of San Francisco revealed that it had signed contracts with Southern California Edison to supply 50-megawatts of electricity from small-scale solar farms it will build in Kern and San Bernardino counties on private land.

The company has also placed bids for the Sacramento utility's solar project.

"Distributed solar is faster on permitting, on environmental issues and interconnection to the grid," said Arno Harris, Recurrent's chief executive. "It offers a safety valve for utilities who don't want to put all their eggs in one basket."

Pacific Gas and Electric is following that strategy. On Monday, the utility filed a request that regulators approve a 48-megawatt contract with Eurus Energy America.

Eurus, which is a joint venture of Japan's Tokyo Electric Power and Toyota Tsusho, plans to build three photovoltaic farms near Fresno, Calif., according to a filing. The vice president of Sharp Solar, Ron Kenedi, said demand for distributed solar had continued to rise during the recession.

"It amazes me how much demand has grown throughout the world," Mr. Kenedi said, noting that Sharp's Memphis solar module factory had added another shift and 180 jobs over the past eight months.

**Fonte: New York Times, New York, Feb. 4<sup>th</sup> 2010, Energy & Environment, online.**

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