

EPA chief leads dedication of Hayward solar landfill conversion

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Guests walk around the West Winton Landfill on Wednesday, May 13, 2015 in Hayward, Calif. (Aric Crabb/Bay Area News Group)

HAYWARD -- An old landfill will be the first in the Bay Area to be converted into a solar farm, with 19,000 panels producing enough energy to power 1,200 homes.

The West Winton Landfill conversion is the centerpiece of the nation's largest government collaboration to create solar energy, with 19 agencies in Alameda, Santa Clara, Contra Costa and San Mateo counties pooling resources to build 186 projects. By coming together, the

government agencies predict they will save taxpayers \$100 million than if the projects were bid separately. The projects will create more than 800 jobs.

"This is about reducing carbon emissions, saving money and growing jobs. It's a win all over the place," said Gina McCarthy, head of the Environmental Protection Agency, at a dedication of the landfill near the shoreline Wednesday.



Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Gina McCarthy, right, talks with Caroline Judy, left, of the Alameda County General Services Agency before a ceremony at the West Winton Landfill on Wednesday, May 13, 2015 in Hayward, Calif. (Aric Crabb/Bay Area News Group)

The 24-acre landfill conversion solar farm will be one of the largest in California. Led by Alameda County, the Regional Renewable Energy Procurement Project's 186 sites will generate a total of 31 megawatts, enough energy to power more than 6,000 average-sized Bay Area houses.

By pooling their resources, the agencies can save up to 45 percent over what it would cost if the projects were built individually, said Caroline Judy, Alameda County General Services Agency acting director.

"It's like the Costco model. If you go to Costco and buy in bulk, you get a better price than if you go to a store and buy each item separately," she said.

Alameda County Supervisor Richard Valle called the collaboration monumental.

"It reminds me of a huge puzzle, bring all these people together," he said at Wednesday's celebration that included several Bay Area government and solar industry representatives.

The Hayward landfill solar project is expected to save Alameda County more than a half-million dollars in energy costs in its first year. The county estimates it will cut its energy bill by almost \$15 million over the landfill panels' expected 20-year life span.

Alameda County worked with the EPA to find suitable "brown field sites" for solar projects.

"This site was recommended because it is a closed landfill; it doesn't have an alternative use," Judy said of the Hayward landfill.

SunEdison Government Solutions, of Belmont, is installing solar panels at the majority of the 186 sites, which include community centers, libraries, fire stations, parking structures, business offices, warehouses and dispatch centers.

In addition to cutting carbon emissions and creating jobs, another advantage of solar energy is that it uses almost no water, unlike more traditional methods of generating electricity, said Sam Youneszadeh, of SunEdison.



The West Winton Landfill is photographed on Wednesday, May 13, 2015 in Hayward, Calif. (Aric Crabb/Bay Area News Group)

"Together, we are delivering cost-effective clean energy solutions that are good for both the environment and the local economy," he said.

Inspired by the success of the regional solar project, the EPA has created the first federal interagency renewable energy collaboration, with the Forest Service, Department of Energy and General Services Administration. The three are working together to have one contract for solar projects at nine federal buildings in California and Nevada, including ones in San Jose, Menlo Park, San Bruno, San Francisco and Mare Island. The sites are expected to produce up to 5 megawatts of solar power.

The federal government is the largest energy consumer in the nation, with an electricity bill of \$5 billion a year for almost 500,000 buildings. President Barack Obama has issued an executive order requiring federal agencies to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent and increase renewable energy use by at least 30 percent over the next 10 years.

McCarthy is the federal government's point person in its climate change battle. She also is leading an EPA initiative to transform landfills and other contaminated sites into renewable energy projects.

"They're being sited on lovely places like this," she joked.

The old Winton landfill, which has been closed for decades, is capped and covered by 30 to 40 feet of clean fill, Judy said.

Work is expected to start in later this year or early 2016, Youneszadeh said.

The landfill panels will be ground-mounted; most of the other sites are rooftops or parking structures.

The county will not have any upfront costs for the Hayward landfill project. Alameda County will lease the site from the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, which owns it.

In turn, the county will sublease the site to SunEdison, which will pay the cost of installing the photovoltaic panels and sell the energy at a reduced price to the county and flood control district. The power will go into the PG&E electric grid, with the public agencies receiving energy credits at government buildings.

Alameda County modeled its collaboration on a similar, but smaller, program by Joint Venture Silicon Valley. That 2010 project included nine Silicon Valley public agencies and more than 70 solar sites. The 11.4 megawatts of solar power from those projects is expected to save more than \$29 million over 20 years.

Alameda County worked closely on the collaboration with Joint Venture Silicon Valley and Contra Costa Economic Project, two organizations that focus on regional collaboration.

In addition to SunEdison, Cupertino Electric and SolarCity were awarded project contracts.

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Collaboration agencies

Nineteen public agencies are pooling resources to reduce installation costs of a combined 186 solar facilities:
Alameda County
Contra Costa County

San Mateo County
Alameda County Fire Department
Berkeley
Castro Valley Sanitary District
Central Contra Costa Sanitary District
Cupertino
Emeryville
Foster City
Fremont
Hayward Area Recreation and Park District
Menlo Park
Mountain View
Oakland
Redwood City
Richmond
UC Berkeley
Walnut Creek

Federal solar project sites

San JoseMenlo Park
San Bruno
San Francisco
Mare Island
Santa Rosa
Sacramento
Reno, Nev.
Carson City, Nev.