

Closed Hayward dump will be transformed into solar farm

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Photos: Michael Macor, The Chronicle

Andre Benson with Alameda County Services along a row of signs showing Bay Area cities and counties associated with the nation's first federal solar partnership, which was announced by United States EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy during a visit to the West Winton Landfill property in Hayward, Calif., on Wed. May 13, 2015. Plans are to install 19,000 solar panels on the landfill site.



United States EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy flanked by solar panels announces the nation's first federal solar partnership during a visit to the West Winton Landfill property in Hayward, Calif., on Wed. May 13, 2015. Plans are to install 19,000 solar panels on the landfill site.



United States EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy meets Russell Hancock, (right) President/CEO, of Joint Venture SiliconValley upon arrival to announce the nation's first federal solar partnership during a visit to the West Winton Landfill property in Hayward, Calif., on Wed. May 13, 2015. Caroline Judy, Acting director of Alameda Co. General Services Agency, (left) Richard Valle, Alameda County Supervisor, (third from right) Sam Youneszadeh, from SunEdison, (second from right). Plans are to install 19,000 solar panels on the landfill site.

The quest to harvest the sun's rays moved Wednesday into a Hayward garbage dump where federal and local officials announced plans to build a solar farm that will serve as a model for the nation on innovative ways to combat climate change.

The 19,000 solar panels planned for the closed-down West Winton Landfill will be the signature piece of an unusual four-county effort to equip nearly 200 public buildings — city halls, fire stations, medical facilities — with the solar energy equivalent of powering more than 5,000 homes.

“We can use this as a model for other agencies to do this across the country,” said [Gina McCarthy](#), administrator for the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) at a news conference held on the windswept grass and wetland area next to San Francisco Bay where the dump used to be. “There is lots more we can do. We know there are contaminated sites across the country. There are contaminated sites right here. We can bring these sites back in a positive way.”

The effort, known as the Regional Renewable Energy Procurement, is being touted as one of the largest and most innovative solar projects in the country. It involves 19 cities, sanitary districts, fire departments, recreation areas and UC Berkeley collaborating with the EPA to build a solar network on publicly owned property around the Bay Area.

Panels planned at 186 sites

The partners plan to place solar panels atop buildings, libraries, fire stations, city halls, vacant lots and dump sites at 186 locations in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. All together they will produce 31 megawatts of electricity.

The West Winton project, which is expected to be completed next year by SunEdison, will provide 6.6 megawatts, enough to power 1,200 homes. It will be the first solar installation at a landfill in the Bay Area and one of the largest urban solar projects in California.

The project is possible because of cost savings achieved using what are called power purchase agreements, meaning the solar vendors will own the panels and charge counties through PG&E for every kilowatt hour produced.

[Sam Youneszadeh](#), a managing director of sales at SunEdison, said solar landfill projects have been done in New Jersey, Maryland and Massachusetts, but this will be the largest such project his company has ever done.

“It is taking a landfill with zero use to society and using it for the future and to generate jobs and tax revenue,” he said. “This is a continuation of a trend that’s taking place and hopefully kicking off a trend in California.”

Economic benefits touted

All together, the renewable projects planned in the Bay Area are expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions each year equal to the amount generated by 6,300 homes, authorities said. The collaborative expects the solar projects to generate 839 jobs and save taxpayers \$100 million in energy costs.

McCarthy said it is just the type of innovative solution that is needed to combat climate change. She said it is a shining example of “government agencies joining together in a project that is good for the environment, the regional economy and local taxpayers.”

McCarthy said the federal government, inspired by the collaborative program in the Bay Area, is now working on a similar network at nine sites in California and Nevada.

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