

Geothermal still outpowers wind, solar in California

Industry convenes in San Diego through Wednesday

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Amid soaring investment in solar and wind energy technology, commercial geothermal plants still anchor the state's production of non-fossil fuel power.

Geothermal energy provides 42 percent of California's commercial, in-state renewable electricity generation, an industry group announced at its convention in San Diego.

About 160 businesses are participating in the Geothermal Energy Association Expo. The event at the Town & Country Resort and Convention Center concludes Wednesday.

Geothermal power is made by tapping underground heat to make steam, which in turn drives huge generators. New projects continue to come online, not far from San Diego.

Five new geothermal projects in the Salton Sea area of Imperial County are expected to start production in 2012. Developed by CalEnergy, EnergySource and Ormat Technologies, those plants will have a combined capacity of 239 megawatts, enough energy to power more than 150,000 residences -- though not in San Diego.

San Diego Gas & Electric contracts geothermal power from elsewhere in the state. Last year the utility signed a four-year agreement with Calpine Corp. for 25 megawatts of electricity.

Calpine has major installations at the Geysers, in Sonoma and Lake counties, the largest developed geothermal power source in the state and the world.

Students can register and tour the floor of the geothermal exposition for free. Registration is \$50 per day for the general public.