

# Imperial County first large-scale solar plant starts energizing Sunrise Powerlink

Alejandro Davila, Imperial Valley Press, 5-30-13

CALEXICO — The Valley's first large-scale solar plant became the first to deliver solar-generated power to Sunrise Powerlink and is set to energize thousands of San Diego homes.

This milestone, reached by Tenaska Imperial Solar Energy Center South, was celebrated Wednesday by dozens of officials and industry representatives who gathered for the ceremonial "flipping of the switch."

"This is the first solar project, the second project total in Imperial County to be delivering across the Sunrise Powerlink," said James Avery, San Diego Gas & Electric senior vice president of power supply.

He added several more projects will do the same in the next 12 months.

"Within a year we are going to have 1,000 megawatts delivering clean renewable energy from Imperial County to San Diego, which, by the way, is displacing fossil fuels," said Avery, who noted these types of projects are helping SDG&E reach the 33 percent renewable energy portfolio mandated by the state ahead of others.

In connecting to Sunrise Powerlink, California Energy Commissioner David Hochschild said Tenaska's solar plant has become part of a number of important renewable energy projects the state now holds.

California, Hochschild noted, is now home to the largest wind, solar, geothermal and solar thermal energy projects in the world.

"This has all happened in the last two years and it is exciting. I think we as Californians should be proud because we are leading the rest of the world. We are driving costs down and pushing innovation," he said.

Government and energy officials not only advertised eventual cost savings, technology innovation and a positive impact to the environment as noteworthy benefits brought by renewable energy projects such as Tenaska's, they also listed its capacity to create jobs.

This comes as no surprise in a recovering economy and within a county that has struggled with double-digit unemployment rates for decades.

More than 70 percent of the workforce was local and much of it came from Calexico, said Supervisor John Renison while referring to Tenaska's project.

Renison, like the rest of the Imperial County Board of Supervisors, has been adamant in bringing renewable energy development to Imperial County.

And the effort has produced jobs.

As of May of this year four solar projects have created nearly 740 jobs, most of them for Imperial County residents, according to International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 569 statistics.

"I'm happy for the county, I'm happy for Calexico and I'm happy for the renewable energy future of this county

because anyway you cut it, these are the right projects to push and we will continue to do that,” said Renison. “These projects will create thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars ... of economic benefits to the county and its residents for years to come.”

But to say that all county residents support utility scale renewable energy development in Imperial County would be a stretch.

Some oppose these types of development and call for rooftop solar projects as they question sacrificing agricultural land and desert habitat for what they say is an industry that does not create long-term employment.

In response, officials argue that rooftop solar cannot address the commercial scale energy demand of metropolitan areas.

Meanwhile, renewable energy permitting continues in the county, albeit at a slower pace when compared with previous years.

Still, projects are in the pipeline, said county Planning Director Armando Villa, who noted the county Board of Supervisors is expected to rule on a solar project for Niland in the next few weeks.

“It really hasn’t stopped,” said Villa while referring to renewable energy development.

“We still have two or three more in the process and (have) approved about 14 projects,” he said, noting some projects will likely go before the Board of Supervisors next year.

And yet, when asked about renewable development in the future, Villa said “It’s probably going to stop for a little bit because most of the big companies like (SDG&E), they’ve pretty much bought most of the energy they need.”

He added that if the state decides to increase the mandated renewable energy portfolio to 50 percent, “which has been talked about, you are going to see a lot more activity.”