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solar electric power association

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Utility Use of Solar Grows Dramatically – And Not Just in the Sunniest Regions

SEPA report shows top utilities expanded solar integration by 100 percent in 2010

Key Findings:

- *Marked growth in utility solar power in states outside the Southwest*
- *Growth in centralized projects*
- *Major increase in utility ownership of solar capacity*

America's electric utilities are ramping up their use of solar power, and not just in the sunny Southwest. That's one of the principal findings of the new 2010 SEPA Utility Solar Rankings report released today by the Solar Electric Power Association.

"More and more utilities are integrating solar power into their energy portfolios, including many in states like New Jersey, Idaho and North Carolina," says Julia Hamm, president and CEO of SEPA. "Solar power has largely been associated only with California and the Southwest, but that's no longer the case." In SEPA's 2008 Rankings report, 75 percent of the new solar capacity was located in California. By contrast, in the 2010 survey, 63 percent of new capacity came from other states. "Utilities nationwide are finding new ways to take advantage of the benefits of solar power for themselves and their customers," said Ms. Hamm.

SEPA's report identifies the Top 10 U.S. utilities that added the most new solar power to their systems last year and the Top 10 utilities that added the most solar on a watts-per-customer-served basis.

Altogether, the Top 10 utilities reported that they added 561 megawatts of new solar capacity, an increase of 100 percent over 2009.

Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), in northern California, led all utilities in the most new solar energy added to its grid with a total of 157 megawatts. But the next two positions are held by East

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Coast utilities: Florida Power & Light Company (FPL), based in Juno Beach, Florida, and Public Service Electric & Gas Company (PSE&G), based in Newark, New Jersey. The highest ranked cooperative utility on the list – Tri-State Generation and Transmission Cooperative Association (Tri-State) in Colorado – was sixth with 30 megawatts of solar added in 2010.

On a watts-per-customer basis, the utility ranked first was a municipal utility, Silicon Valley Power in Santa Clara, California. It was followed by PSE&G and Hawaiian Electric Company.

The report also identifies two other noteworthy trends: a growing number of solar projects are centralized, and more utilities are choosing to own their own solar capacity, rather than rely largely on purchasing solar from independent power producers.

"In the past, utilities have largely relied on distributed photovoltaic systems for most new solar capacity," Ms. Hamm said. "They are now integrating more larger-scale centralized projects."

In 2010, these centralized installations included a 48-megawatt photovoltaic project in Nevada, the Copper Mountain project, with power purchased by PG&E, and a 30-megawatt PV facility in New Mexico, the Cimarron project, with power purchased by Tri-State. In addition, the largest new concentrating solar power project in nearly 20 years – the 75-megawatt Martin Solar Center – owned by FPL, went into operation.

Of the 561 megawatts of solar added last year, 140 megawatts are actually owned by the utilities. "The ownership trend is a truly significant finding," Ms. Hamm says. "It represents a 300 percent increase over the numbers reported in 2009."

"We expect the growth in utility solar power to continue," says Ms. Hamm. "Our findings show that utilities are continuing to find new, viable business models for bringing the benefits of solar power to their customers."

The report contains additional details about the total solar capacity of U.S. utilities, rankings by regions, geographical diversity and other utility solar trends. The full report can be found at www.sepatop10.org.

SEPA will also host a complimentary webinar to discuss the report on Thursday, June 23, at 2 p.m. Eastern, 11 a.m. Pacific. The one-hour webinar will be led by SEPA's Research Director, Mike Taylor. To register for the webinar, visit http://www.solarelectricpower.org/events/webinars.aspx. The webinar is free for SEPA members and non-members.

About SEPA

SEPA is an educational non-profit organization based in Washington dedicated to helping utilities integrate solar power into their energy portfolios. The SEPA Top 10 Utility Solar Rankings report is one of many market intelligence, utility interaction and educational services SEPA provides its utility and solar industry members. For more information about SEPA, visit our website at www.solarelectricpower.org.