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MD's largest solar project under construction



Constellation Energy announced today that it's begun work on a 16.1-megawatt solar power plant at Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg that when finished will be Maryland's largest single generator of electricity from the sun - at least for now.

Earth movers recently began clearing and grading the site for the \$60 million project, which is expected to be completed next year.

Constellation plans to place 220,000 thin-film photovoltaic panels on 100 acres it is leasing from the Catholic institution, capable of generating more than 22 million kilowatt-hours of electricity. The facility will be owned and operated by the Baltimore-based energy company.

Burning coal to produce the same amount of energy would release 15,170 metric tons of climate-warming carbon dioxide - roughly equivalent to what 2,975 cars and trucks spew from their tailpipes annually, according to Environmental Protection Agency data.

The project was made possible by a 20-year power purchase agreement with the state and the **University System of Maryland**. The state will be paying a fixed rate of 22.25 cents per kilowatt-hour, well above the current cost to generate power from burning fossil fuels. But Kevin Lucas of the **Maryland Energy Administration** says that higher cost is offset by the marketable solar renewable energy credits the state also gets, which are now selling for about 17.5 cents/kwh.

The panels were made by **First Solar**, an Arizona-based company with manufacturing plants in Ohio, Germany and Malaysia. The construction is expected to employ 75 people on average, and up to 150 at its peak, according to Constellation. Once finished, the company says it will be run and maintained by two workers.

The Emmitsburg facility is one of four large-scale renewable energy projects being pushed by the O'Malley administration by offering long-term power purchasing agreements. While the largest in the state for now, an even larger, 20-megawatt project is proposed by Easton-based **Maryland Solar** on 250 acres of farmland at a state prison complex in Hagerstown.

Constellation plans to build a separate 1.3-megawatt solar array to generate power for Mount St. Mary's.

*(Photo: Aerial view of solar plant construction site, by **Something in the Sky** for Constellation Energy)*

Posted by Tim Wheeler at 9:16 AM