

N.J. solar arrays make creative use of tight spaces

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Solar power requires two essentials: sunshine and a place to install the panels.



CARMINE GALASSO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Howard Hurwitz, executive director of the Northwest Bergen Utilities Authority, surveying a solar array in Waldwick.

The Northwest Bergen Utilities Authority in Waldwick recently unveiled two football field-sized solar arrays sitting on a platform 11 feet above tanks holding raw sewage.

Seventeen miles to the south, the Meadowlands Commission announced plans this week to build a "solar canopy" over its parking lot in Lyndhurst in addition to a previous project to install panels on some of its closed landfills.

"In New Jersey you have to be more creative," said Tom Buono, a vice president at Vanguard Energy Partners in Branchburg, which built the array in Waldwick. "In California or desert states like Arizona or New Mexico, you have vast amount of land to put large arrays on."

Much of the utility authority's 21 acres is covered by buildings, roads and dozens of processing tanks that turn 10 million gallons of sewage into clean water each day. The only place where a large array could fit and face southward was over the tanks.

Staffers had seen a small solar display over some tanks at Morristown's sewer plant.

"That's where we got the idea, but we went a step further," said Howard Hurwitz, executive director of the Northwest Bergen Utilities Authority, which serves 75,000 residents in 11 towns. "About 90 percent of [Morristown's] panels were on grass and 10 percent were over the tanks. We knew we had to put ours over the tanks."

The \$2.3 million project took two months to complete, with workers dangling over tanks as they set up a large metal canopy to hold 1,547 solar panels.

On an overcast morning this week, the panels were providing about 27 percent of the plant's energy. It can get as high as 40 percent. Hurwitz says the plant will save \$80,000 a year by generating its own electricity and selling solar credits on the open market.

The Meadowlands Commission received \$8.5 million in federal stimulus funds to build what's being billed as the state's largest solar power facility on the 1-A landfill in Kearny, which has been dormant for 30 years.

The 5-megawatt array could generate enough electricity to power 600 homes.

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