



**St. Paul's RiverCentre to get \$2 million solar energy project
System will be installed on roof**

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Downtown St. Paul will be home to the largest solar-energy installation in the state next year, funded by a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy.

District Energy St. Paul, which provides heating and cooling for downtown's commercial and residential buildings, will provide matching funds of \$1 million. By the end of 2010, it will install a \$2 million, 1-megawatt solar energy system on the roof of the St. Paul RiverCentre that will heat water for downtown.

The system will offset energy that District Energy expends burning waste wood for its heating system.

District Energy derives about 70 percent of its energy from waste wood, which is a renewable resource, and its goal is to raise that to 100 percent, said Anders Rydaker, District Energy president. The energy company considers its \$1 million an investment, but it has not calculated when it will break even, Rydaker said.

St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman said District Energy's solid reputation in renewable energy circles was a major factor in snagging the grant.

Solar energy sparks dreams of cheap, clean energy, but so far it is more expensive than conventionally produced electricity, which mostly comes from coal and natural gas.

Coleman said he thinks the project will push solar energy forward. "It's a technology that is so much more economically viable now, and doing things like this so we better understand how it works will help to drive costs down," he said.

The \$1 million grant from the Department of Energy comes from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which was designed to stimulate the economy and included extensions of a tax credit for solar energy projects until 2016.

The Department of Energy is funding solar energy projects in cities spanning the country in hopes of speeding development of solar technologies and making them cost-competitive with conventional power production.

The St. Paul project is supposed to stimulate the Minnesota market for solar energy and increase visibility of solar thermal energy in a northern climate, officials said.

The recent rain and gloom notwithstanding, the Twin Cities has more sunshine on average than Germany, the global leader in solar energy development, said Charlie Hemmeline, director of Market Transformation for the Energy Department's solar program.

"Solar is coming. It is the wave of the present, not the future," Hemmeline told city officials and renewable energy supporters during a news conference at the RiverCentre.

The federal government's interest in solar energy stretches back decades, but venture capitalists and others have made recent large investments in developing cheaper and more efficient photovoltaic solar technology, Hemmeline said.

The cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis jointly submitted a grant for the program. While St. Paul will get the solar heating system, Minneapolis will receive a \$30,000 grant for NRG Thermal LLC to study how it can plug into solar technology. NRG Thermal provides heating and cooling to downtown Minneapolis buildings.

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