

## ✓ On a rainy day, St. Paul touts solar energy

Officials highlighted a \$2 million project to install solar panels on the roof of the RiverCentre convention center.

By **CHRIS HAVENS**, Star Tribune

Rain clouds didn't make for the best backdrop Friday to extol the virtues of the sun's power, but officials from St. Paul, Minneapolis and the U.S. Department of Energy still hailed a \$2 million project to put solar panels on the roof of the RiverCentre in downtown St. Paul.

Energy generated would heat water and create electricity to run the convention center. The project will study how well solar can be used with existing energy systems and to see whether that mix of systems can work financially.

Half of the project money comes from a federal stimulus grant. District Energy St. Paul is contributing the remaining \$1 million.

District Energy is a nonprofit utility that provides heating and cooling for buildings and houses in the downtown area through steam and hot and cold water. It uses wood chips, natural gas, oil and clean-burning coal.

The grant is part of a \$10 million American Recovery and Reinvestment Act allocation spread among 25 U.S. cities to speed the adoption of solar power, build a skilled workforce and push for new technologies and lower costs.

The solar energy produced will reduce the use of fossil fuels, said Anders Rydaker, District Energy's president. The project is expected to create 1,000 kilowatts of energy, the most of any other solar project in Minnesota, he said.

The goal is to have all the panels installed and the project running by December 2010.

Charlie Hemmeline, director of market transformation for the Energy Department, said the project is an example of cities finding ways to make the transition to more renewable energy systems. He said his department hopes cities can share what they learn.

In addition to the \$1 million grant, the Energy Department gave \$30,000 to NRG Thermal to do a study on integrating solar energy into its Minneapolis system.