

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 30, 2009

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California ISO Symposium Sheds New Light on Integrating Solar Power

(Folsom, CA) The California Independent System Operator Corporation (California ISO) hosted an international symposium at its Folsom headquarters to learn more about how to reduce barriers for solar power projects hoping to compete in the ISO energy markets. The gathering of more than 175 participants, many in person and others via phone and webcast, focused on better production forecasting for large solar power plants.

“Solar power is fast becoming a viable competitor to conventional power plants,” said ISO Senior Policy Issues Representative Jim Blatchford. “We learned from the wind industry that good forecasting makes it much easier to manage the ups and downs of wind production. We want to apply that same lesson to solar generation.”

Blatchford notes, however, that forecasting the sun is different than forecasting the wind. “Some of the tools will be the same, but there will be some significant differences, too. This symposium is helping us identify and develop the right forecasting tools before several thousand megawatts of new solar production come on line.”

One participant at the solar symposium, BrightSource Energy based in Oakland California, plans to develop more than 4,000 megawatts of solar thermal generation in California and Nevada. “The Mohave Desert is one of the best places in the world for solar thermal power,” said Senior Director of Transmission Bob Stuart. “There is an immense capacity there. And we’re very pleased the ISO convened this meeting because the end result should be a better understanding for all of us how solar power can participate and compete in California.”

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The California ISO is committed to helping the state meet its' Renewables Portfolio Standard (RPS). The current goal of 20 percent will likely be increased to 33 percent. That is driving a large expansion of wind, solar and other renewable power resources. Wind and solar are intermittent resources, meaning electricity production can vary with the weather.

The California ISO is responsible for keeping the supply in constant balance with the demand for electricity. Demand constantly fluctuates with the weather, the time of day, the season and many other variables. California ISO systems read the grid every four seconds and adjust the energy supply to keep pace with demand. With more wind and solar coming on line, the supply side will also fluctuate. Accurate and timely forecasts of power production from these intermittent generators can help reduce the impact on grid operations.

“We learned a lot from this symposium,” said Grant Rosenblum, manager of renewable integration at the California ISO. “There are several distinct types of solar generation and each one has different operating and forecasting characteristics. We need to allow for those differences as we work to accommodate more solar and more renewables in general.”

The California ISO is a not-for-profit public benefit corporation charged with managing the flow of electricity along California's open-market wholesale power grid. The mission of the California ISO is to safeguard the reliable delivery of electricity, and ensure equal access to 25,000 circuit miles of “electron highway.” As the impartial operator of the wholesale power grid in the state, the California ISO conducts a small portion of the bulk power markets. These markets are used to allocate space on the transmission lines, maintain operating reserves and match supply with demand in real time.

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