

ORNL goes solar with 288-foot span of panels

23 January 2009, Frank Munger, The Knoxville News Sentinel, Tenn.

Oak Ridge National Laboratory wants its energy operations to be as advanced as its energy research.

"It's the right thing to do, but it also gives us a test-bed to demonstrate in a real-world sense the viability of these solutions," ORNL Director Thom Mason said Thursday, soon after dedicating a new solar array that is the second largest in Tennessee and will provide more than 50 kilowatts of power to the lab's energy grid.

The energy produced by the 288-foot stretch of solar panels along Bethel Valley Road will offset nearly half the power use in one of ORNL's nearby research facilities and expand a green initiative known as the "sustainable campus" project.

Dana Christensen, an associate lab director, said ORNL is pushing a regional effort to broaden use of renewable energy sources, including solar, by demonstrating the possibilities.

The Oak Ridge lab hosted a solar summit last year to kick-start the initiative, coinciding with Gov. Phil Bredesen's program to lure alternative energy companies to Tennessee.

"Solar power is a force to be reckoned with here in the South," Christensen said.

Lightwave Solar installed the lab's solar array as part of a \$500,000 contract, according to Melissa Lapsa, who heads the sustainable campus program at ORNL.

Lapsa said the laboratory is looking to integrate the latest and greatest energy technology.

As part of that program, the lab earlier awarded an \$89 million contract to Johnson Controls. The biggest project will be a new steam plant that's fueled by burning wood chips instead of coal.

"We have unparalleled capabilities for meeting the nation's energy challenges, but we also have the opportunity and the responsibility to lead by example," Mason said.

"If it's going to be real, we should be proving that ourselves."

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