

Italy to host Europe's biggest solar plant: company

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Activists of the environmental group Greenpeace hold banners reading, "Go Solar" during a demonstration in Rome in 2009. Europe's most powerful solar power plant is set to start operations in Italy later this year, the US company building the installation on an area as large as 120 football pitches said on Thursday.

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The plant in Rovigo near Venice in northeast Italy will take up 850,000 square metres (9.15 million square feet) and produce 72 megawatts, SunEdison said in a statement announcing the start of construction.

The current biggest plant in Europe, located in Spain, produces 60 megawatts and the second biggest, in Germany, 50 megawatts, SunEdison said.

"The photovoltaic park in Rovigo province is a milestone in the development and establishment of [solar energy](#) in Italy," SunEdison's general manager for Italy, Liborio Francesco Nanni, said in a statement.

The total investment will be between 200 million and 250 million euros (273 million and 342 million dollars), the company said.

[Energy production](#) will begin in the second half of 2010 and the plant will be fully operational by the end of the year, said SunEdison, which is working on the project in conjunction with Spanish banking giant Santander.

During its first year of operations, the plant will cover the electricity needs of 17,000 households and will prevent the emission of 41,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

SunEdison, a subsidiary of US company MEMC Electronic Materials, is the top solar power company in the United States and the third biggest in the world.

Italy is second to Germany for solar power production in Europe.

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