

Edison going after spacious roofs

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By Matt Wrye

Imagine a 250-megawatt power plant coming to the Inland Empire.

Where would you put it?

Believe it or not, space isn't an issue.

Sun-baked warehouse roofs might become the region's next prime real estate if the California Public Utilities Commission gives Southern California Edison the green light to embark on a Southland solar-panel project worth \$875million.

Dozens of photovoltaic solar panels bound to transform sunlight into electricity are already being installed by the Rosemead-based electricity giant on a ProLogis distribution building's 600,000 square-foot rooftop in Fontana, a \$7million undertaking that's estimated to produce 2 megawatts of electricity.

The Fontana project is Edison's first step, which the PUC will look at closely.

But it's nothing compared to the grand proposal.

Ultimately, Edison wants to lease enough Southern California commercial rooftop space - probably 100 or 150 buildings - equal to 2 square miles and throw hundreds more solar panels into the mix to pump 250 megawatts of electricity onto the grid.

"There's nothing like that in the world," said Gil Alexander, spokesman for Edison. "These owners wouldn't necessarily think of putting solar panels on their roofs. We came along and said, 'We'll lease the roof and cut you a check every month'."

The daunting project's electric output would equal about one-tenth the juice pumped out by one of California's largest power plants, the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. That's enough power for 162,000 households, Edison says.

But the state PUC might not approve Edison's plans.

It's no coincidence Edison chose the Inland Empire to kick off its dream. The region is popular for its sprawling warehouses sporting millions of square feet in rooftop space.

Ali Sahabi, a strong and open advocate of what he calls "sustainable communities," is optimistic about Edison's plan if it wins PUC approval.

"The opportunity of turning these rooftops into potential renewable energy sources is unlimited," said Sahabi, president and CEO of Corona-based SE Corp., a residential and commercial developer. "We're already the hub for transportation and logistics centers.

"These rooftops are the greatest opportunity because of the amount of sun we have."

Solar Panel Operation

Southern California Edison's proposed 250-megawatt photovoltaic solar-panel operation would be the largest of its kind.

The nation's largest photovoltaic facility, located at Nellis Air Force Base near Las Vegas, produces 14 megawatts of electricity.

The world's largest photovoltaic facility, located in Spain, produces 28 megawatts of electricity.