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■ Tekst 10

For Solar Power, Foggy City Maps Its Bright Spots

By DEAN E. MURPHY



SAN FRANCISCO, Nov. 23 – High above the streets on rooftops flat and wide, nearly a dozen sun-gazing contraptions are shedding new light on this city’s foggy reputation.

Resembling lunar probes on spindly legs, the machines are equipped with sensors that measure solar energy. Readings are transmitted by radio to the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, where engineers plot them on a computerized “fog map” of the city.

The Solar Energy Monitoring Network, as the rooftop system is known, is the backbone of an unusual effort to transform San Francisco into the country’s largest municipal generator of solar power and other renewable energy.

Using the information the monitors gather on where the sun shines and how long, the utility plans to position solar panels around the city that it says will add 10 megawatts of solar power to the electricity grid over the

next five years. That is about as much solar power as is now generated in Sacramento, the municipal leader nationwide. On average, 1 megawatt is enough electricity for 1,000 homes.

The long-term hope in San Francisco is to increase solar generation an additional 40 megawatts – enough to meet about 5 percent of the city’s peak electricity needs – by installing photovoltaic panels on dozens of publicly owned structures, including schools, parking garages, covered reservoirs and even the municipal sewage plant.

“It is certainly remarkable,” said Terry M. Peterson of the Electric Power Research Institute, a research consortium in Palo Alto, Calif., supported by utility companies. “But any time you do something for the first time, you incur risk. If things don’t go well, and costs come in higher than expected, or the systems don’t perform as expected, it will have a bad effect.”

By mapping the sunniest and foggiest neighborhoods, officials in San Francisco are looking to increase the odds for success. So far, municipal buildings around Golden Gate Park have been ruled out, while the piers along San Francisco Bay are considered promising. The fog map and solar data are being made available on the Internet (www.solarcat.com/sfsolar/main.htm) for businesses and homeowners interested in installing their own solar energy systems.

The New York Times

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1p 42 □ Wat wordt bedoeld met “Bright Spots” in de kop van tekst 10?