

Town of Beloit solar array is largest in state

By ERIN KELLY Staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, July 19, 2016 4:00 pm

TOWN OF BELOIT — About 500 Alliant Energy powered homes in Janesville and Beloit run on clean energy from a new solar facility in the Town of Beloit.

The solar facility is the largest in Wisconsin and powers homes in Janesville and Beloit. Alliant Energy serves about 53,000 customers in the Janesville-Beloit area.

Alliant Energy Spokesperson Scott Reigstad said the homes that run on solar energy are a drop in the bucket when compared with the company's 461,000 customers in Wisconsin; but it's a start, he said.

"It's more environmentally friendly," said Reigstad. "We're making a move towards cleaner energy."

Solar energy has become a more viable fuel source because the cost of the technology is decreasing, Reigstad said.

He said one reason the company is making the switch is because it's what customers want.

The Rock River solar project began in August 2015 and was completed in June. The 2.3-megawatt solar facility generates sun-powered energy from more than 7,700 solar panels. It is nearly 17 acres and is built on top of an old landfill, which is about 20 acres. The solar facility uses about 17 acres of the landfill.

"Locating the solar project on our landfill maximizes its environmental benefit by reusing and revitalizing it," Reigstad said.

Alliant Energy is closing many of its coal powered plants and replacing them with natural gas powered plants, which Reigstad said is part of their efforts to invest in cleaner fuel sources.

Reigstad said they still need a 24/7 base load power because renewable sources don't generate power all the time.



Solar facility

A new solar facility in the Town of Beloit is the largest in Wisconsin. The more than 7,700 solar panels power about 500 homes in Janesville and Beloit.

The company is switching from coal to natural gas as a base load power because Reigstad said it's a cleaner fuel source. Many argue that while natural gas emits less carbon dioxide than coal when combusted, natural gas may be more environmentally harmful than coal. When natural gas is drilled, extracted and transported in pipelines, it leaks methane, which is a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists.

A new natural gas facility and solar station are scheduled to complete construction in 2020. The solar station will produce power to offset a portion of the Riverside Energy Center facility's auxiliary power needs, Reigstad said. The new solar facility was designed, built and is owned and operated by Hanwha Q CELLS USA. Alliant Energy purchases power from the facility for customers under a 10-year agreement that will expire in 2026. At the end of the agreement, Alliant Energy has the option to purchase the solar facility. Alliant Energy owns the property on which the facility was constructed as well as the other buildings on the site, such as Riverside Energy Center.

"We're excited about the benefits that solar power will bring to our Town of Beloit property and to the Beloit and Janesville communities," Reigstad said.