

## Ga. Power says renewable energy must compete

RAY HENRY - Associated Press - Associated Press

Renewable energy must cost about the same as traditional power sources such as natural gas or coal-fired power plants before Georgia Power will buy green energy on a large scale, company executives said Monday.

Officials from the Southern Co. subsidiary said at a Statehouse conference that it wants to increase its usage of solar power from just over four megawatts now to more than 55 megawatts by 2015. That's still a relatively small amount of electricity, or roughly 5 percent of the energy produced by just one of the nuclear reactors that the utility hopes to build in eastern Georgia.

Georgia Power Vice President Greg Roberts, who handles planning and pricing, said the utility will buy energy from green power sources so long as the cost is comparable to traditional power plants. Roberts said the firm is willing to both buy green energy and pay for some of the costs of building alternative energy projects.

"But we're really not willing to pay above that cost because we will drive up the cost for all customers if we do that beyond what we would be able to purchase in the market or build ourselves," Roberts said.

Like most southeast states, Georgia does not require publicly regulated power companies to buy a set amount of its power from renewable sources. Renewable energy projects in Georgia have largely focused on proposals to develop offshore wind energy, biomass plants and solar energy projects.

Georgia Power currently buys more than 4 megawatts of solar energy, and bids are due Monday from those willing to sell the company an additional megawatt of solar power. That program is subsidized by utility customers who voluntarily pay an extra charge to finance renewable power projects.

Responding to a request from state regulators, Georgia Power has proposed adding an additional 50 megawatts of solar energy to its system. If the project is approved by the elected regulators on the Public Service Commission, it would be the first time that Georgia Power customers would pay for solar power as part of their normal electricity bills.

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