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3.3 acres of rooftop solar panels will make Woodbridge installation nation's largest

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The nation's largest rooftop solar panel installation is planned for the FedEx Ground distribution hub on Industrial Avenue later this year.

The 340,000 square-foot facility will be fitted with about 12,400 solar panels, covering about 3.3 acres of rooftop, the company said in a statement.

Construction on the 2.42-megawatt solar power system will begin this month and is expected to be complete by November. The panels will provide 30 percent of the facility's energy needs. BP Solar will install and operate the panels and FedEx will purchase the power they generate.

FedEx's is not the first solar panel project to be announced in Woodbridge, which continues to be a solar energy leader in a state that outshines 48 others in solar energy production.

Bayshore Recycling Corp. in Keasbey announced in March that it would install a \$5.7 million solar panel system later this year to power much of the facility's concrete, asphalt, brick and block recycling operations.

The township's municipal government has begun installing panels on six of its buildings, the largest public project of its kind in the state. The \$5.5 million panels will provide the township with up to 15 percent of its energy needs.

Meanwhile, the Board of Education is looking to have solar panels installed at five schools — Indiana Avenue School No. 18, Menlo Park Terrace School No. 19, Woodbine Avenue School No. 23, Iselin Middle School and Colonia High School — by the 2010-11 school year with the goal of reducing district energy costs.

"We're on the cutting edge," Mayor John E. McCormac said. "Between FedEx, Bayshore and the township itself, we have the real pioneers of solar panel installation in the state."

The state Board of Public Utilities says New Jersey has nearly 4,000 solar panel installations producing more than 87 megawatts of energy, second only to California.

That wattage is expected to double just from the energy that will be produced through Public Service Electric & Gas's \$515 million solar panels project. The utility company will mount panels on 200,000 utility poles in its coverage area and place rooftop panels on five of its facilities, including the Central Gas Plant in Edison.

PSE&G's solar panels will be installed by South Plainfield-based Petra Solar at a cost to PSE&G customers of an extra 10 cents a month for the first year, the company said in a statement.

Solar energy, unlike fossil fuels, is renewable and environmentally friendlier.

FedEx, for example, said the energy produced by its Woodbridge installation would reduce the need to produce about 1,867 metric tons of carbon dioxide a year, the equivalent of not burning 211,900 gallons of gasoline or the electricity for 259 households.

The environmental consideration is what's pushing state and federal agencies to provide rebates and incentives for municipalities, businesses and homeowners to invest in costly solar panel installations.

The state BPU has more than \$288.5 million in financial incentives or renewable energies, about 95 percent of that going toward solar energy projects.