



Solar power project success stories

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Some time around the end of March, the U.S. passed the 1 million mark for solar installations, according to the Solar Energy Industries Association. Even more impressive is the fact that 90 percent of these systems came online in the last 10 years. Here are the stories of five families and one community that now depend on solar and how they paid for it.

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With about 13,000 residents, North Adams is one of the smallest cities in Massachusetts, set in picturesque Berkshire County near the New Hampshire and New York state lines. Since September of 2015, 80 percent of the power for the city's 33 buildings has come from its three solar arrays--the largest of which is a 14-acre, 3.5-megawatt field of photovoltaic panels that sits atop a capped landfill.

"The landfill is on a 170-acre parcel, so no neighbors were affected and there was no opposition to the project," says Ross A. Vivori, the city assessor, who spearheaded the solar project stalled at no upfront cost to taxpayers through a lease arrangement, the panels have slashed the city's electric bill. Before the solar went in, the city spent about \$900,000 a year for electricity. For fiscal year 2016, North Adam's first full solar-powered year, the city has saved 42 percent in energy, according to Vivori, about \$378,000--roughly the cost of six teacher salaries in the area.

Since installation, the landfill array has provided (at publication time) about 1.85 gigawatt hours of electricity, preventing the release of 4.8 million pounds of carbon, the equivalent of planting 55,482 trees.



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