

Montecito sets course for emergency energy independence

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Ensuring that water flows, emergency operations continue and other critical government functions push on in times of calamity is the idea behind the newly launched Montecito Community Microgrid Initiative.

An area served by just one high-voltage transmission line, Montecito is vulnerable to power outages — as was seen during the Thomas Fire and mudslides. But the World Business Academy and the Clean Coalition say a microgrid that taps solar and other energy sources when the main power grid fails can bring "energy resilience" to critical facilities in Montecito.

Several microgrids are planned, including San Ysidro Road in the Upper Village and Coast Village Road in the Lower Village.



This image shows the two phases of the Montecito Community Microgrid and how much electricity backers say could be produced through solar power.
Montecito Community Microgrid Initiative

First up, however, would be the fire protection and water districts, in the Upper Village, which, according to backers, have the potential for producing 49 and 28 kw, respectively, through solar power.

The potential along Coast Village Road is even greater: 1,267 kw, according to the groups.

"Teaming with the Clean Coalition, with whom we've enjoyed a multi-year relationship, to focus on execution of the Montecito Community Microgrid Initiative, will free the academy to continue working on microgrid installations throughout the Santa Barbara County area," Rinaldo Brutoco, president of the World Business Academy, said in announcing the initiative.

Staging and planning for the Upper Village portion would run up to 18 months and cost \$300,000, while the Lower Village phase would take about the same time and cost double.

Equipment and construction estimates are as follows:

- Phase I: \$7.5 million
- Phase II: \$22.5 million (The scope of this project is almost five times that of Phase I)

Under normal conditions, backers say, the community's carbon footprint drops dramatically thanks to the microgrid — and would help advance regional, state and global climate action goals.

"The Clean Coalition has done a great job leading community microgrid efforts throughout the state and around the country and is uniquely suited to team with the academy in Montecito," Mr. Brutoco said in a statement. "It is a great partnership that will benefit Montecito initially and other areas in Santa Barbara County in the future."