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## Camarillo joins growing list of high fire-threat California cities opting to install microgrids

By Michaela Althouse

With summer just around the corner, California cities are solidifying measures to avoid a repeat of last year's blackouts.

The City of Camarillo voted this month to install five solar-based microgrids at five critical city sites in preparation for any public safety power shut offs. Altogether, the projects include 4 MW of solar power with 4.2 MWh of battery storage, with additional diesel backup generators for long-term outages. The city already voted to install a Tesla battery at the wastewater treatment plant, one of the potential sites.

Nonprofit Clean Coalition will oversee the designs of the sites, which will be paid for by either a PPA or be owned and operated by the city with the help of potential Federal Emergency Management Agency funds. The designs are set to be completed by August.

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Communications Director for Clean Coalition Rosana Francescato said that the renewable-coupled microgrid sites offer highly resilient sheltering sites on top of environmental and economic benefits for the city.

“Given these significant benefits, coupled with the risks of severe weather and power outages, every municipality in California should consider deploying Solar Microgrids at critical community facilities,” Francescato said.

Camarillo, a high fire-threat area, had originally considered diesel generators before Clean Coalition approached the city in 2020 to consider solar microgrids. A study from Clean Coalition, completed last year, found that the hybrid solar microgrids were the most feasible and economic solution. The solar-plus-storage aspects can power the critical locations alone for 1-2 hour outages and provide 20 percent of critical load during longer outages of a week or more.

“Renewable energy is critical for truly resilient microgrids,” Francescato said. “Solar-plus-storage microgrids deliver tremendous resilience value, and this is something that diesel or gas generators cannot do.”

With the state scrambling to avoid a repeat of last year’s blackouts this summer, renewable-powered microgrids have entered the conversation as potential backup generation. Francescato said this has led to growth in the microgrid market, with many individuals, municipalities, school districts and universities seeking to deploy the resource. Clean Coalition is also currently assisting the Santa Barbara Unified School District install microgrids at six sites and solar at an additional eight sites via 28-year PPAs.



However, she noted that there still needs to be larger backing to really kick off large amounts of microgrid deployment.

“While deployments like these will help pave the way for more microgrids in California and beyond, what is needed to really grow the microgrid market in California is more supportive policies and market mechanisms,” Francescato said.



In 2018, California passed SB 1339, a bill that directed the CPUC, Energy Commission and CAISO to develop policies incentivizing microgrid development. So far, the CPUC allowed microgrids to fast-track the interconnection process and restructured the microgrid rate, but Clean Coalition noted that the proceedings did not do much to incentivize energy storage as the backup power instead of fossil fuels. The CPUC is in the midst of scoping for Track 3 of the microgrid proceedings, which will look at standby charges.

