

Full steam ahead: Raser begins work on geothermal power plant

By Brice Wallace Deseret News
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A Provo company is helping Utah warm to the idea of using geothermal power to help the state meet its goal of increasing use of renewable energy.

Raser Technologies Inc. on Friday had a ceremonial groundbreaking for a geothermal plant in Beaver County -- the first new geothermal facility in the state in more than two decades and the first in the nation to use new technology that allows energy to be captured from sites with temperatures lower than the typical geothermal facility.

At 11 megawatts -- enough to power about 9,000 homes -- the plant is small. "But it's one that's very key and pivotal, and it will be the first of its kind in the nation," said Brent M. Cook, Raser's chief executive officer, at a news conference in Salt Lake City later Friday. "We at Raser believe that this is the right way to generate electricity and that it is the wave of the future in addressing some of our country's needs with regard to energy."

Raser hopes to have the new plant online by the first week of October. The plant will be the first of three facilities planned in the Escalante Sevier desert area. Two of the three will provide power to the city of Anaheim, Calif. The company also has about 101,000 acres in Utah leased for possible development. Raser has eight projects in development in six Western states.

Cook noted that modular power units produced by UTC Power, a United Technologies Corp. company, allow for Raser to get facilities built and operating quickly. He described the plant as "really a heat farm designed to capture the heat of the earth and to generate electricity with zero-emissions in a green and environmentally friendly manner, rather than belching smoke into the air."

Dianne Nielson, energy adviser to Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr., said the new plant represents "a clean new energy contribution to Utah and the Western grid," as well as an economic-development stimulant and a clean resource "without air-pollution and greenhouse-gas contributions, an important consideration at this time in our energy future."

State legislation this year puts in place a 20-percent renewable-energy requirement for power utilities and power-producing municipalities by the year 2025. "At this rate," Nielson said, "we're going to far exceed that goal."

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, commended Raser for its innovation. "If we are interested in slowing carbon emissions significantly, we must increase our green sources of base

power. Today, Raser Technologies is doing just that," he said at the Raser news conference.

Hatch introduced legislation that became part of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 to make renewable tax incentives more easily available for geothermal projects. Last week, he co-sponsored a measure in the Senate to further extend tax incentives for renewable energy production.

"When I first introduced my geothermal incentives bill, I didn't realize that a Utah company would be first out of the gate with the latest technology, but I'm proud -- very proud -- that one of our own is leading the way here and leading the charge," Hatch said.

The new plant is the third geothermal facility to be built in Utah. Utah Power & Light Co. developed a still-operating geothermal site at Blundell, also in Beaver County, in 1984. A subsequent plant built in 1986 is no longer operating. E-mail: bwallace@desnews.com