

General News

RENSSELAER COUNTY County Inks New Solar Power Agreement

Rensselaer County is continuing efforts to obtain energy more efficiently and effectively, announcing a subscription with OYA Solar for 7.4 MW of clean energy from OYA projects across the state.

The county subscription is expected to generate \$3 million in savings over the 25-year lifespan of the solar project. The partnership between Rensselaer County and OYA was announced Monday, April 12 on the roof of the County Office Building in Troy.

The agreement diverts 7.4 megawatts of the county's electrical load from grid electric to solar. Over the length of the subscription, 35,000 tons of CO2 emissions will be avoided, which is the equivalent of 17,500 gasoline powered vehicles being taken off the road.

"Rensselaer County has been committed to saving taxpayer money wherever possible, and that is especially true in the field of energy purchases. We have entered into productive partnerships that allow for long-term savings while ensuring a reliable source of energy for county operations," said McLaughlin.

"Our partnership with OYA will allow Rensselaer County to protect taxpayers and benefit the environment with a cleaner source of energy," added McLaughlin.



Rensselaer County Executive Steve McLaughlin announces new deal with OYA from the rooftop of the County Office Building Monday morning. Photo by Doug La Rocque.

Along with the partnership with OYA, the county is saving over \$600,000 in renewable energy costs. Those savings include the county renegotiating utility agreements for a savings of \$215,000, a first phase of the county's solar initiative to divert 2.2 megawatts from the grid, and 3.5 million kilowatt hours for the county Sewer Department being generated through hydropower.

The county had originally joined with Monolith Associates for the solar project. That arrangement ended when Monolith ceased operations.

OYA currently has three 5 megawatt solar projects under construction in western and northern New York, and hopes to announce plans for more, including the Capital Region, in the near future.

4-H Tractor Safety

Rensselaer County 4-H would like to welcome all area youth 4-H and non, 14 years old and older to participate in the 2021 Capital District 4-H HOSTA/Tractor Safety Program. This program is a great opportunity for youth who currently work on farms or around machinery, those who will be seeking employment on a farm, or anyone who would just like to learn more about farm and machinery safety.

The focus of the curriculum is safe operation and maintenance of large equipment, personal protection, chemical, mechanical and electrical hazards as well as live-stock handling. Employers and parents should be aware that youth aged 14 and 15 years who are not working directly for their parents must have a tractor operator's certificate to legally operate large equipment according to OSHA. HOSTA will prepare participants and qualify them to earn a tractor operator's certificate if students attend all classes as well as pass a written and operator's exam.

Due to COVID-19, this year's program will look slightly different. An orientation, farm tours and various presentations will take place via Zoom on the evenings of May 6, 13, 20 and June 3. A chance to practice using equipment will be held on the morning of June 5 at the Washington County Fairgrounds. The written test will be done virtually through Qualtrics, and the skills test will happen in-person on the morning of June 12 at the Washington County Fairgrounds.

Cost of the program is \$35 and will be due on the first day of class.

Please contact Kayela at the CCE Rensselaer office if you have any questions or to pre-register at 518-272-4210 / kls342@cornell.edu.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Senators Gillibrand And Rubio Push Legislation For Vets With Diseases Linked To Burn Pits

Senator Gillibrand Press Release

U.S. Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Marco Rubio (R-FL), U.S. Representatives Raul Ruiz, M.D. (D-CA) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), alongside Jon Stewart, 9/11 activist John Feal, members of BurnPits 360, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), and numerous veterans advocates stood together on Tuesday, April 13 to call for landmark bipartisan, bicameral legislation; the Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act. The bill would streamline the process for veterans to obtain benefits from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for illness due to exposure to burn pit and other toxic exposures. Approximately 3.5 million veterans have been exposed to burn pits that spewed toxic fumes and carcinogens into the air.

The legislation would remove the "burden of proof" from the veteran to provide enough evidence to establish a direct service connection between their health condition and exposure. Rather, the veteran would only need to submit documentation that they received a campaign medal associated with the Global War on Terror or the Gulf War and they suffer from a qualifying health condition. Campaign medals are awarded to members of the armed forces who deploy for military operations in a designated combat zone or geographical theater.

"The stories we heard today are proof that the system is failing veterans and their families. Veterans who are sick with illnesses due to exposure to toxic chemicals while serving this country do not have time to spare," said U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand. "The connection between exposure to burn pits and the devastating health effects of respiratory illnesses and rare cancers



Senator Kirsten Gillibrand speaks at a conference in Washington announcing support for the Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act. Photo courtesy of Senator Gillibrand's Office.

is clear. No one should have to spend years jumping through hoops, doing research, and paying for doctors and biopsies to prove to the VA that their illness is service-related. And no one who is grieving a spouse lost to these diseases should have to fight the VA to get the benefits their family is owed. This is more than a health care crisis, it's a moral outrage. The Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act will finally establish a presumptive service connection for veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxins and streamline the process for obtaining vital VA benefits. I urge my colleagues on both sides of

the aisle to support this bill and to apply common sense and common decency to a broken process."

"Our war fighters had a job to do, and they did it honorably and without hesitation," said U.S. Senator Marco Rubio. "We will never be able to repay them and their families for their sacrifice, but we can – and we must – take care of them now. This historic and long overdue legislation will cut through the red tape to ensure veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxins while defending our nation will receive the care they need and deserve. No more excuses. No more delays. It is time to act."

TACONIC VALLEY NEWS AND NOTES

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either college or vocational training. Current or former Berlin graduates who have overcome obstacles and/or struggled through adversity are eligible. Cindy was a Petersburg firefighter and officer that despite battling cancer continued to be an active member until just before her death.

The successful applicant should exemplify the interests and values of Cindy as evidenced by a caring nature, active involvement in the community and concern for others. Applications are available at the Berlin Guidance office and must be postmarked by June 1.



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