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## Santee Cooper vows cleaner power

By Zane Wilson  
The Sun News

Santee Cooper will quadruple to 40 percent by 2020 the amount of electricity it makes from non-greenhouse gas sources and created a new department to oversee the effort.

Chief Executive Lonnie Carter said Friday it was an unprecedented move for an S.C. utility, and that he is not aware of another anywhere that has set the bar as high.

"This is a pretty aggressive goal; it will be a challenge for us," Carter said.

"This aggressive and far-reaching policy will chart a bold new direction regarding Santee Cooper's conservation and renewable efforts," said Santee Cooper board Chairman O.L. Thompson.

The board approved the change Friday, showing its full support and commitment, Thompson said.

The state-owned utility serves most of Horry and Georgetown counties either directly or indirectly, with about 2 million residents statewide receiving power from it.

The move is not related to complaints from some conservationists about Santee Cooper's plans to build a new coal-fired power plant at Kingsburg to serve growth in the Pee Dee, and the change will not affect those plans, Carter said.

One of the state's most vocal conservation organizations praised Santee Cooper for its pledge to increase its alternate energy production but said it seems to clash with the utility's plans for a power plant that uses "the one fuel that's most detrimental" in contributing to climate change.

"Why build a dirty coal plant? It undermines the effort," said Ben Moore, director of energy programs for the S.C. Coastal Conservation League.

Carter said the coal plant is needed to meet the growing demand in Horry and Georgetown counties and will have the best available anti-pollution technology.

Growth is happening so fast that even with a new coal plant that started in January, demand exceeded capacity at peak use in the summer, and the utility had to buy some power from other companies, Carter said.

The growth also is fueling the push for alternate energy, he said.

Those alternatives include making energy from landfill gases as the utility is doing in Horry County, wind and solar power, conservation and efficiency measures, and nuclear generation.

"This is a good, solid business decision, a strategy decision," not simply a gesture toward conservation, Carter said.

"This is not just rhetoric."

The change requires creating a new department that will start with existing employees who have experience in alternative energy and adding more people later, Carter said.

Leading the new department staff is Marc Tye, who has been with Santee Cooper for 23 years.

He was named vice president of conservation and renewable energy.

The significance of creating a new department means that alternative energy will be put on the same level as coal power in the utility's operating structure, Carter said.

Santee Cooper has been a leader in conservation and renewable energy for years, Carter said, beginning with its engine oil recycling service available to all residents.

"We were the first to have scrubbers" on power plant stacks, Carter said.

The utility has a "solar schools" program, and began offering a program earlier this month in which people who generate their own electricity with solar power can get credit on the Santee Cooper bill.

Santee Cooper is working with Coastal Carolina University, Clemson University and the Belle Baruch Foundation on wind power research at CCU's Waties Island facility in Horry County and the Baruch Foundation property near Georgetown.

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