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Santee Cooper's clean power goal

By LONNIE CARTER

Guest columnist

For more than two decades, Santee Cooper has been a leader in protecting our environment. We are proud to be the first utility in the state to offer Green Power, and proud of our history of generating electricity using landfill gas, promoting conservation and energy efficiency, installing state-of-the-art emission control technology and funding innovative research into alternative forms of energy.

We have recently announced another first. Santee Cooper is the first South Carolina energy company to establish a vice president of conservation and renewable energy reporting directly to the president/CEO.

And we have set an ambitious goal: to create 40 percent (more than four times our present usage) of energy from non-greenhouse gas emitting resources, biomass fuels, energy efficiency and conservation by 2020.

What does all of this mean? It means that Santee Cooper is strengthening its already powerful commitment to conservation and renewables, organizing to fulfill that commitment even more efficiently and setting a very high goal that can have a profound effect on our state and our environment.

More than 2 million South Carolinians in all 46 counties receive their power directly or indirectly from Santee Cooper. Our responsibility is to provide power that is reliable and affordable.

Fulfilling that responsibility, we face two significant challenges. The first is our state's rapid rate of growth. And the second is the need to protect our planet's precious resources.

South Carolina's population is expected to increase by 10 percent by 2010 and 25 percent by 2025. That's an increase of more than 1 million residents!

And, of course, people are building bigger houses, and we are all using more technology requiring more electricity to power computers, flat screen TV's, iPods, cell phone chargers and so many other conveniences of contemporary life.

Furthermore, on a per capita basis, South Carolinians are relatively high users of electricity because we primarily use electricity for heating our home and other tasks that are served by gas and other energy sources in many other states.

Current sources of power generation cannot possibly meet the growth in our state's electricity needs.

That's one reason why conservation and renewable energy are so important. And the other reason is our collective responsibility to protect and preserve our planet's finite resources.

We have been practicing and promoting conservation for decades. And we have been using a diverse energy mix that includes hydro, methane gas, nuclear and solar energies. We are also currently involved in three pilot research programs with Clemson and Coastal Carolina universities to test the viability of wind power in South Carolina.

We can — and will — do more. That's what our recent announcement is all about, and it's what future announcements of additional initiatives will be about. This is a process of continuously improving a vital, long-term commitment.

Independent analyses show that we are projected to be nearly 600 megawatts short of meeting our baseload needs by 2013. Even with our best efforts, we cannot save that large amount of energy by that year. If we don't find a way of generating that energy, there could very well be significant outages — brownouts not just in homes and offices, but also in schools, hospitals and nursing homes.

At best, even our strengthened conservation and renewable initiatives will contribute only modestly to meeting this projected shortfall.

To keep power reliable, our new Pee Dee Energy Campus will be built with the best available environmental control technology, enabling us to reduce more than 90 percent of the nitrous oxide and mercury, more than 97 percent of the sulfur dioxide and 99 percent of the particulate matter associated with coal.

The Pee Dee Energy Campus is consistent with Santee Cooper's decades-long commitment to environmental responsibility, as it will be built with the best available environmental control technology, including scrubbers. It is this commitment that is at the core of this company's responsibility to continue providing reliable, affordable energy to South Carolinians in every county of our state.

Mr. Carter is the president and CEO of Santee Cooper.

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