

July 30, 2009

## Houston tries to put the sun to work

Austin is usually the Texas town getting kudos for being green on the energy front ([despite hiccups](#)), but Houston [shouldn't be counted out](#) so fast.



Some of the panels on the U.S. 59 side of the GRB. (Courtesy of Standard Renewable Energy)

The city today formally unveils a 600 solar panel pilot project on the roof of the [George R. Brown Convention Center](#) (yes, we know [this hasn't been a secret](#)) and may be close to announcing the winner of a bid to build a new (yet tiny) solar power plant.

The convention center project is modest - capable of generating 100-kilowatts, or enough to **fully power about 20 Houston homes** (including a/c). But it will be the largest in the area and will be good demonstration project that could encourage others to follow suit, said **Chris Boyer**, Chief Technology Officer of [Standard Renewable Energy](#), the firm that installed the units.

"There are a lot of architects in Houston that are interested in solar, so if you can build this first and show it's feasible you could see others following suit," Boyer said.

The technology isn't exactly cutting edge, says Boyer: the crystalline silicon panels from [BP Solar](#) and thin film panels from [Unisolar](#) have been used in larger installations in the past. But how well they'll perform in Houston's more humid environment at such a scale is still relatively unknown, he said.

Project costs are being [absorbed entirely](#) by private-sector sponsors including [AIA Houston](#), BP America, [CenterPoint Energy](#), **Houston Architecture Foundation** and [Houston Endowment](#). The [Houston Advanced Research Center](#) will manage the pilot program and analyze day-to-day developments.

True, this oil and gas-centric city [isn't the easiest place for living green](#). But the City of Houston already has solar panels on its permit building on Main Street and the City Hall Annex, and it's also one of the [Department of Energy's Solar America cities](#). The big test will be the **development a 10 megawatt solar farm** that the city issued a [request for proposals](#) on last year. It has narrowed it to one company (not Standard Renewable Energy, however). Negotiations continue, said city spokesman Frank Michel, but it's planned for a large tract of land south of Sunnyside Park on the north side of Reed Road off of 288.