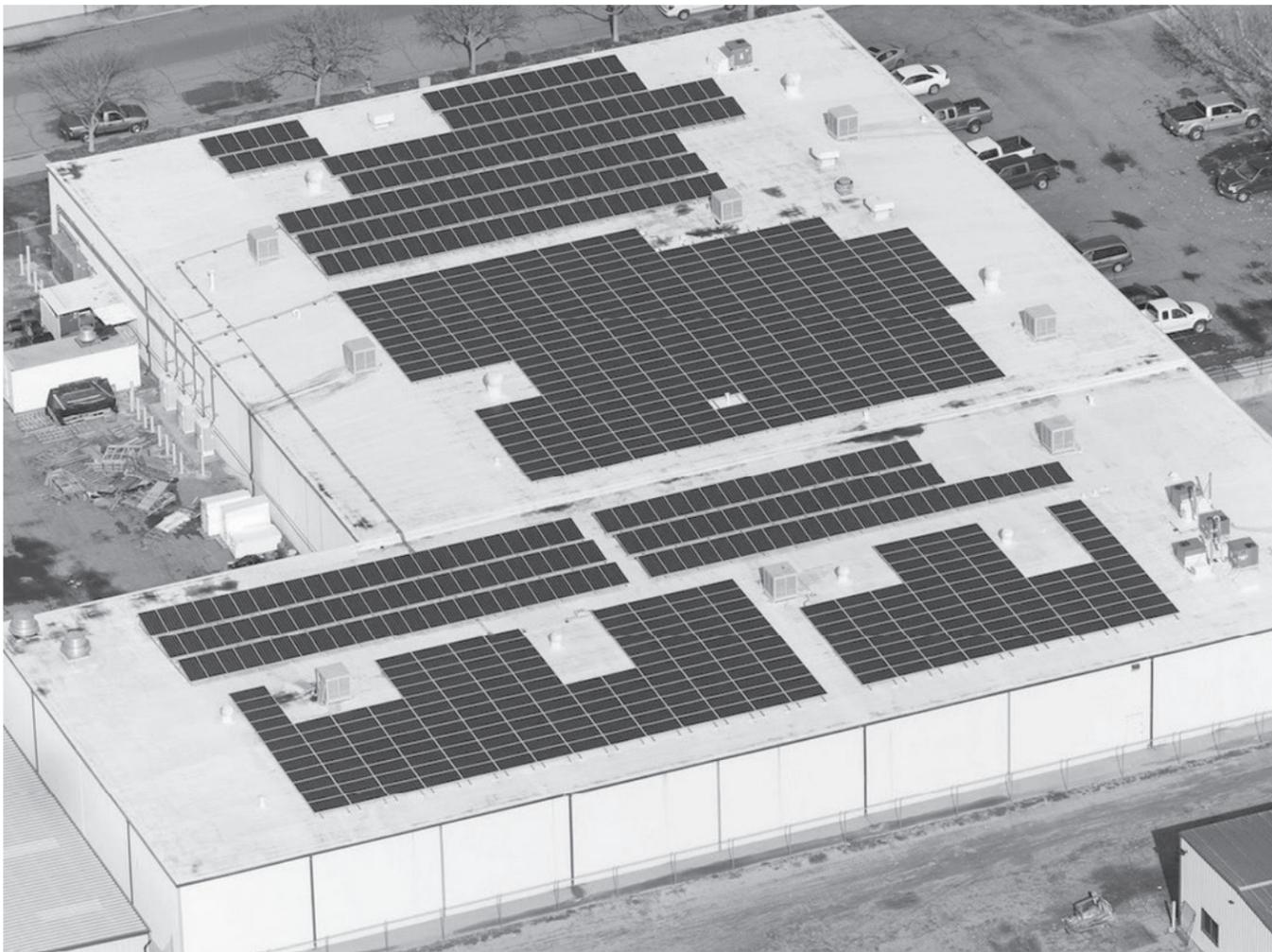


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CONTRIBUTED | Barrier Solar of Fresno installed this 250-kilowatt rooftop solar array on top of the California Industrial Rubber plant in Fresno.

Report: Valley helping to drive state's clean-energy boom

George Lurie - STAFF WRITER

Fresno County shines bright in a new report that calls the area the state's top region for industrial solar power.

With 11,132 kilowatts of installed industrial solar-power generating systems, an amount larger than the installed industrial solar power systems in the San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara and Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim regions combined, Fresno ranks No. 1 in the Golden State.

The ranking — and new report — come from Next 10, an independent, nonpartisan organization founded by California businessman and philanthropist F. Noel Perry.

Next 10's California Green Innovation Index, released late last month, highlights how the San Joaquin Valley and Inland Empire are driving California's explosive solar growth, which the report notes has increased 1,378 percent between 2009 and 2014.

The solar boom is being driven by the Golden State's widespread embrace of clean technology, according to the eighth edition of the index, which ranks 26 metro areas across a range of indicators.

The report spotlights multiple examples of Fresno's leadership in the solar energy sector. In

addition to ranking highest for industrial solar, Fresno ranks fifth for commercial solar and sixth for residential solar.

Looking at solar usage on a per capita basis, the index finds Hanford-Corcoran leads the state for commercial and industrial solar capacity per one million people.

Bakersfield ranks third for industrial solar capacity and fifth for residential.

In terms of overall clean energy usage, one South Valley region takes it on the chin in Next 10's latest index, which ranks the Hanford-Corcoran area dead last among 26 California regions in clean vehicle rebates. The number of those rebates issued in Kings County dropped 36 percent between 2014 and 2015.

The Hanford-Corcoran area also ranked second to last in green tech patents, according to the Next 10 report.

The San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara area topped Next 10's rankings in both green technology patents and clean vehicle rebates per capita.

"As the sixth-largest economy in the world and an innovator in climate and energy policy, California is forging a decoupling between economic growth and

carbon emissions per capita," said Next 10's Perry. "California is not only the fourth-most energy-productive economy in the world, the state also leads in key clean tech indicators, like clean tech patents and investment."

"Much of the rest of the nation is following our lead," Perry added.

The Next 10 index tracks key economic and environmental indicators at the regional, state, national and international level.

"California is a global leader when it comes to expanding its economy without increasing per capita emissions—this trend represents a shift from old growth models," said Christopher Thornberg, founding partner of Beacon Economics, an independent research and consulting firm, which compiled the clean-energy index for Next 10.

As of 2014, renewable energy sources served 25 percent of California's retail electricity sales, and generated 20.1 percent of California's total electricity, up from 12 percent in 2009.

Internationally, California maintains its ranking as 4th in the world for the share of electricity generated from renewable sources. Solar energy generation increased 1,378 percent between

2009-2014 while wind generation increased 155 percent during this period and in-state biomass increased 10 percent.

Illustrating the solar boom currently underway in the Golden State, the report showed Californians installed 3,266 megawatts (MW) of solar photovoltaic (PV) in 2015 alone, more than any other state in the U.S., bringing the state's total to 13,243 MW.

Grid-connected, utility-scale solar provided 15,592 GWh in 2015, up from only 1,000 GWh in 2011 while total residential megawatts (installed capacity) increased 65 percent in 2015, total megawatts interconnected in the industrial sector almost doubled, and the commercial sector saw a substantial 42 percent increase.

If California were a country, it would rank fourth in the world for energy productivity (2013), climbing from 5th place in 2012.

Tracking greenhouse gas emissions in California, the report found that transportation-related sources account for 36.9 percent, industrial sources contribute 23.6 percent, electric power generation makes up 20 percent and ag and forestry-related emissions comprise 8.2 percent.

"California's increasing energy productivity and renewable energy growth are not accidents," Perry said. "They can be tied to policies, from the landmark AB 32 climate and clean energy law to last year's SB 350, which increases the Renewable Portfolio Standard to 50 percent clean energy and calls for a 50 percent increase in building energy efficiency by 2030."

Last year, California spearheaded the so-called "Under 2 MOU." This international memorandum of understanding, which U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said "could be a game changer," gives states and regions a formal way to commit to cutting emissions and limiting the increase in global average temperature to below two degrees Celsius.

So far, 128 jurisdictions from 28 countries and six continents have signed the MOU. Together, they represent more than a quarter of the global economy.

"The Under 2 MOU is an example of California's leadership on climate and clean energy," Perry said. "This year's Green Innovation Index connects the dots and shows how you can trace progress on clean energy and climate from innovations in California's metro areas to policies to commitments made by governments around the world."

George Lurie | Reporter can be reached at: 490-3464 or e-mail george@thebusinessjournal.com