



Southwestern strikes deal to get all power from wind

University will get electricity from West Texas turbines for as long as 18 years.

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Southwestern University will get all its electricity for the next 18 years exclusively from wind power in an agreement with the City of Georgetown signed Tuesday.

The deal makes Southwestern the first university in Texas to get all its power from renewable sources, according to the school. It will get the power from Georgetown's city-owned utility through an agreement with AEP Energy Partners, a subsidiary of Ohio-based utility American Electric Power.

The actual electrons needed to power the lights at Southwestern, a liberal arts college with about 1,300 students, will come from Texas' general electric grid, but the university says it is buying enough wind power to cover all its energy use.

Through Georgetown, the university is buying electricity from two AEP wind farms in West Texas that have 151 turbines. The initial contract is for five years and is renewable through 2028. The university says the agreement will help it meet a long-term goal of being carbon neutral, or not adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.

In February, university President Jake Schrum signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment, which formally commits campuses to eliminate their greenhouse gas emissions over time and educate students about climate neutrality.

Southwestern is one of Georgetown's largest customers, with energy needs that are equivalent to the demand from 450 homes, said Jim Briggs, assistant city manager for utility operations.

Under the agreement, Southwestern will pay Georgetown a fixed rate for the wind power. Neither the university nor the city would disclose the exact rate for competitive reasons.

Richard Anderson, vice president for fiscal affairs at Southwestern, said the rate is higher than what it pays now, but he said the university assumes conventional electricity rates will rise and that the university will break even on the deal in three to five years.

"In a relatively short time, we expect to break even and then see actual savings," he said. "It's better for our budget for energy costs in the long run, not only because of fluctuations in the energy market, but also because of unexpected events," such as rate and regulatory changes.

Anderson said the deal will go into effect with next month's billing cycle.

The agreement also helps the city move toward the goal of meeting 30 percent of the city's energy needs from renewable sources by 2030, Briggs said. He said wind power from AEP will provide electricity to other businesses in Georgetown as well. With the deal, about 10 percent of Georgetown's electricity portfolio will come from renewables.

According to the federal Environmental Protection Agency, five of the top 20 university purchasers of green power get all their power from green power, which include renewable sources such as wind.

A partner in Austin Energy's GreenChoice renewable energy program, St. Edward's University in Austin buys the equivalent of at least 3 percent of its energy consumption in wind power from Austin Energy.

The University of Texas did not return a call for comment Tuesday.

"We hope Southwestern will be an inspiration to other universities to advance sustainability," Schrum said in a statement.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin