

Here Comes the Sun

Kaiser Permanente is using solar panels to create its own green energy and ease the negative health effects of climate change. Pictured, a solar electric installation at the Kaiser Permanente Pleasanton Technology Campus.

At 10 a.m. on a sunny Tuesday in September, the temperature was already 97 degrees in the parking lot of Kaiser Permanente's Pleasanton Technology Campus.

All that sun beating down on Pleasanton will soon generate 1.4 million kilowatt hours of electricity each year when a solar panel project in the parking lot is complete in December. That's the same amount of energy produced from burning 1 million pounds of climate-warming coal or 111,000 gallons of gasoline, according to the [Environmental Protection Agency](#).

Kaiser Permanente is aiming to improve the health of the communities it serves by building solar power projects — 30 so far in Northern California — that reduce the need for burning coal or natural gas to produce electricity, said Arik Goodman, Kaiser Permanente Northern California practice specialist for energy, water, and waste.

“A major contributor to community health is the health of the environment,” Goodman said. “Our core business is having people live healthier lives, so we need to have an impact on the environment to do that.”

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), ecological damage from climate change will increase cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, increase deaths from extreme weather, and increase water-borne and infectious diseases.

By the end of 2020, the number of Kaiser Permanente solar projects in Northern California will grow to 51, and all new buildings beyond that will be evaluated for solar, Goodman said. When finished, the currently scheduled projects will produce 62 million kilowatt hours of clean electricity, which is the equivalent power produced by burning 48 million pounds of coal or 5 million gallons of gasoline. They will also save the organization about \$5.5 million a year in electricity bills.

National Leader in Green Energy

On a national level, Kaiser Permanente's solar power production from 95 projects rises to 109 million kilowatt hours each year and is part of the reason the organization received a [2019 Green Power Leadership Award](#) from the EPA.

Solar power, along with other energy saving measures, will lead Kaiser Permanente nationwide to carbon neutrality by the end of next year, which means the climate-changing pollutants it produces will be offset by green energy production, said Gary Mullaney, senior energy consultant in National

Facilities Services at Kaiser Permanente.

Both Goodman and Mullaney said as the organization grows, so too will clean energy projects. Mullaney said Kaiser Permanente is already moving from solar panels on Kaiser Permanente rooftops and parking lots to investments in utility scale green energy projects off site such as a massive solar energy project in the Southern California desert and windmills on the Altamont Pass in Northern California.

“We’re taking a big picture, holistic approach to our carbon neutral goal,” said Mullaney.

In addition to producing clean energy, Kaiser Permanente is also reducing energy demand through such things as using energy efficient computers, installing light bulbs that turn off when you leave a room, and using windows to help heat and cool building interiors.

Since 2010, Kaiser Permanente has reduced its energy demand per square foot by 10.3% in Northern California, said Mullaney.

“We’re driving down energy use and generating clean, green energy,” he said. “And those efforts will improve the health of our members.”