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Georgia Power Wins Approval to Switch Coal Plant to Biomass Power

The Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC) has approved a request from Georgia Power Company to convert its Plant Mitchell Unit 3 from a coal-fired power plant to a biomass power plant. Located near Albany, Georgia, the facility will be able to produce 96 megawatts of power once the conversion is completed in June 2012, making it one of the largest biomass power plants in the United States. It will draw on surplus wood fuel from suppliers within a 100-mile radius of the power plant. Georgia Power, the largest subsidiary of Southern Company, requested the conversion last summer and plans to begin the conversion by spring of 2011. The Georgia PSC approved Georgia Power's request on March 17, while also approving the utility's construction of two new nuclear power units at its Vogtle Nuclear Power Plant in southeast Georgia. See the [Southern Company press release](#) on the initial request and the press release on the approval from the Georgia PSC ([PDF 153 KB](#)). [Download Adobe Reader](#).

A recent report from the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy notes that such biomass power plants would be key for a near-term shift to renewable energy in the Southeast. According to the report, 11 southeastern states currently draw on renewable energy for about 5% of their electricity sales, but that percentage can increase to 15% by 2015. To do so, the utilities in the region would mainly need to draw on biomass power, which has the advantages of being a constant, baseload power source. The region would also need to draw on much smaller amounts of hydropower, solar power, and wind power. In the long term, the report foresees utilities drawing on increasing amounts of solar power and offshore wind power to meet their energy needs. See the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy [press release](#) and full report ([PDF 690 KB](#)).

Biomass power is also making headway in other parts of the country. In late February, Xcel Energy filed for approval to convert the remaining coal-fired unit at its Bay Front Power Plant to biomass by adding a biomass gasification facility to the facility, which is located in Ashland, Wisconsin. The utility already burns wood in two of the three boilers at the power plant, and the conversion will make it the largest biomass power plant in the Midwest. If approved, construction will start next year, with commercial operation anticipated in late 2012. Meanwhile, the California Energy Commission (CEC) has initiated its review of two 53.4-megawatt solar thermal power plants that will each include a 40-megawatt biomass power plant to supplement the solar power. If approved, San Joaquin Solar 1 and 2 will be built just east of Coalinga in Fresno County, and the plants should start operating in early 2011. See Xcel Energy's Web page for the [Bay Front Biomass Gasification Project](#), and see the CEC [press release](#) and [licensing case](#) for the solar thermal-biomass hybrid project.