



**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
FOR A PROPOSED
SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEM PROJECT
SAN FRANCISCO VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL
CENTER, CALIFORNIA**

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, Council on Environmental Quality Regulations implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Parts 1500-1508), and Title 38, Part 26.4(a), *Environmental Effects of VA Actions*, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate and document potential environmental effects associated with the Proposed Action.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

The VA is proposing to install a solar photovoltaic (PV) system at its medical center in San Francisco, California to expand the use of renewable energy within the facility. The San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC), which operates 124 hospital beds and a 120-bed community living center, is located at 4150 Clement Street, near the northwestern tip of the San Francisco peninsula, within the 29-acre Fort Miley campus, abutting the Golden Gate National Recreation Area to the north, west, and east.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to install a solar PV system at the SFVAMC that: 1) increases energy efficiency through the use of an on-site renewable electricity generation system; 2) reduces energy consumption costs and decreases reliance upon off-site electricity supplies; and 3) contributes toward the achievement of energy efficiency and greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals established by the VA and Executive Order (EO) 13514.

The VA has selected Alternative 2: Proposed Action with a reduced scope, under which the VA would install solar PV systems at five potential locations at the SFVAMC, including four locations on existing rooftops (Buildings 12, 200, 203, and 205) and one location on an existing parking structure (Building 209). The reduced scope would address the aesthetic/visual impact concerns raised by the United States Department of Interior (DOI) with the elimination of a proposed solar PV system location at the new garage at Parking Area A (Building 212). The reduced scope would continue to avoid installation of solar PV systems within the historic district, and result in limited views of the solar PV systems from onsite locations. The solar PV system would consist of a number of interconnected PV modules, electrical connections, mounting hardware, power-condition equipment, and batteries that store solar energy for use when sunlight is not directly accessible.

Electricity generated from the newly installed solar PV systems would be seamlessly integrated into the SFVAMC electricity distribution system. If the Proposed Action is implemented fully, the combined annual electricity output of the systems would total approximately 941.5 megawatt hours (MWh), or about 4.4 percent of existing electricity usage at the SFVAMC. Operation of the systems would require very little maintenance that would be limited to routine inspections and periodic rinsing of the PV system to remove accumulated dust and debris. The operational lifespan of the solar arrays is anticipated to last at least 20 to 25 years, and individual arrays

may be replaced as needed to extend each system's lifespan. The actual timeframe for implementing each proposed solar PV system installation would depend on available funding, but would likely occur between FY 2012 and 2015.

Public Review

An EA has been prepared, which evaluates the potential environmental impacts of the No-Action Alternative and the Proposed Action. A Notice of Availability identifying the public review and comment period (13 September to 13 October 2010) for the EA was published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on 13 September to 17 September 2010. Fifteen copies of the EA and Notice of Availability were sent to the State Clearinghouse for distribution to applicable state agencies for review. The VA received four public comments (letters and electronic transmissions) during the public review period of the EA, including a Department of Interior letter dated October 13, 2010. Responses were prepared to provide clarification and to address comments related to the environmental analysis contained within the EA. In addition, the Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO) provided an electronic transmission subsequent to the public comment period that they have no comments regarding this EA (E. Carroll, May 2011).

Summary of Environmental Consequences

No significant impacts would occur to the following resources:

- Aesthetics
- Air quality
- Community services and utilities
- Cultural and historic resources
- Floodplains, wetlands, watersheds, rivers, lakes, and coastal zones
- Geology and soils
- Hydrology and water quality
- Land use
- Noise
- Socioeconomics/environmental Justice
- Solid/hazardous waste
- Transportation and parking
- Vegetation and wildlife

The Proposed Action includes the following environmental protection commitments to ensure that project implementation does not have a significant impact on the environment:

- Incorporation of Best Management Practices (BMPs)—including the use of hooded, downward-oriented lighting fixtures to reduce night light and glare—shall occur where appropriate and practicable to reduce effects on the local visual setting.
- Control measures for fugitive dust likely to be generated during project implementation (e.g., daily sweeping and watering of construction areas) shall be implemented to reduce construction-related air quality impacts as regulated by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD).
- BMPs shall be in place during system integration to ensure service disruptions are limited and back-up generators are ready for use in the event that a disruption occurs.
- A standard seismic evaluation of each building upon which the solar PV arrays would be installed shall occur prior to system installation and seismic upgrades shall be incorporated as part of construction activities associated with the Proposed Action, if necessary.

- Regular inspection and maintenance of equipment and implementation of standard safety procedures for hazardous materials storage and handling shall be implemented to protect against releases that could enter SFVAMC's drainage system.
- All activities involving the handling, storage, and disposal of solid/hazardous wastes and building materials shall be subject to specified facility safety procedures and all applicable Federal, state, and local regulations.
- BMPs such as weekend and nighttime restrictions of construction-related activities and the use of noise-controlled construction equipment shall be in place to ensure short-term nuisance noise issues are reduced to the maximum extent feasible.
- BMPs shall be implemented to avoid adverse noise impacts to sensitive receptors in Building 203, including the use of special noise-deafened equipment and limiting noise-producing construction activities (e.g., solar PV system assembly) to off-site areas to the maximum extent feasible.
- BMPs shall be implemented during project implementation to minimize impacts to traffic and parking (e.g., scheduling system component deliveries during off-peak parking hours, minimizing the use of parking spaces for staging areas, minimizing the storage of construction materials onsite, etc.).
- Carport solar PV structures shall be assembled to the extent feasible prior to being hoisted onto the parking garages in order to minimize the temporary closure of parking spaces during installation.
- BMPs to provide appropriate biological monitoring and evaluation shall be followed should an active nest or other evidence of special-status wildlife species be discovered in the vicinity of any of the installation sites.

Decision

This action has been thoroughly reviewed and the VA finds that implementation of the Proposed Action will have no significant impact on the environment. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is based on the contractor-prepared EA, which has been determined to adequately and accurately discuss environmental issues and potential impacts of the Proposed Action and provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

I have considered the information contained in the EA, which comprises the analyses on which the FONSI is based. In light of the conclusions presented in the EA and this FONSI document, I find that the Proposed Action as described above, and in the EA, will have no significant impact on the environment.

Responsible Official:

Lawrence H. Carroll
 Director, San Francisco VA Medical Center

06.15.12
 Date