

TOP STORY EDITOR'S PICK

## Solar farm developer cited for western Virginia environmental violations

Laurence Hammack

May 21, 2024



Aerial photo of the Energix Leatherwood solar farm in Henry County.

ENERGIX

Laurence Hammack

**A** developer of solar farms, including ones in Henry and Wythe counties, allowed stormwater to flow uncontrolled from construction sites, according to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

Energix US will pay a \$158,000 fine for violating erosion and sediment control regulations at seven sites.

The agreement reached with DEQ marked the fourth time that state regulators have cited Energix for running afoul of environmental rules in developing solar farms in Southwest, Southside and Central Virginia.

Energix, an Arlington-based subsidiary of an Israeli renewable energy company, was fined \$92,022 for infractions at two sites in 2022 and **\$97,651 involving seven sites in 2023**, according to DEQ records.

Earlier this month, an Energix official signed the most recent consent agreement, which was posted to DEQ's website this week. The agency will accept public comments through June 21 before taking final action.

---

## **People are also reading...**

- 1 Salem CVS fined \$75,000 for vaccine, drug violations in 2021, 2022**
- 2 Teel: Roster overhaul complete; Tony Bennett focused on Virginia's offense**
- 3 Fishburn Park entrepreneurs sue critic for defamation**
- 4 Christiansburg councilwoman leaves dais to talk to colleagues**

---

Although tapping the sun's energy for power avoids the greenhouse gases produced by burning fossil fuels, the infractions show that development of large banks of solar panels on rural land is not without environmental peril.

An Energix official had not responded to emailed questions by 5 p.m. Tuesday. After the company was cited by DEQ last year, it said many of the problems had been corrected and it was trying to learn from past mistakes.

"At the end of the day, we are an environmental company, so things like this are really important to us," Dominika Sink, the company's senior director of project acquisition and development, said at the time.

The most recent enforcement action from DEQ details additional cases of non-compliance and requires that corrective action be taken, according to agency spokeswoman Irina Calos.

Last year, state inspections of a solar farm being built near the Henry County community of Axton found “large portions of the site in a denuded and not stabilized condition,” the consent order states.

Improper erosion control measures allowed the release of sediment from stormwater conveyance channels “directly into a stream without adequate perimeter controls in place,” the order states.

The 33-page document details numerous other violations at solar farms under construction in the town Wytheville and the counties of Buckingham and Sussex. Earlier DEQ inspections have found similar problems at sites in Appomattox and the counties of King William, Prince George and a second site in Henry County.

Some of the solar farms – including ones in Wytheville and Buckingham – have gone into operation since the inspections were performed, according to the company’s website. Details on others were not available.

As renewable energy grows in Virginia, in part because of a state law that requires the state’s largest power companies to provide all carbon-free electricity to their customers by mid-century, proposed solar and wind facilities are meeting resistance in some communities.

Concerned residents say solar farms mar the scenic views in rural areas and occupy land that could be used for farming. Others fear that the large expanses of solar panels will devalue nearby properties and produce the kind of environmental harm found by DEQ.

In Franklin County, such concerns have prompted Energix to withdraw two proposals for solar farms, the first in the Westlake area and the second near Wirtz.

Last June, the company said it was planning to resubmit plans for the Wirtz facility, which would be located on farmland along Brooks Mill and Burnt Chimney roads, in a modified application for a special use permit.

But county officials said this week they have not heard back from the company.

*Staff writer Jason Dunovant contributed to this report.*

**Laurence Hammack**

(540) 981-3239

**[laurence.hammack@roanoke.com](mailto:laurence.hammack@roanoke.com)**

**By Laurence Hammack**

---