

Ford SA starts Project Blue Oval, a renewable energy programme

Ford Motor Company of Southern Africa (FMCSA) recently launched Project Blue Oval, a renewable energy programme for its Silverton Assembly Plant in Pretoria. The project is part of the company's vision to develop an integrated renewable energy solution that aims to have the plant entirely 'green' and energy self-sufficient by 2024 - making it one of the very first Ford plants in the world to achieve this status.



Source: [quickpic.co.za](https://www.quickpic.co.za)

The company has kickstarted the project through a partnership with SolarAfrica to provide a 13.5mw solar installation for the facility, valued at R135m, which will deliver approximately 30% of the Silverton plant's annual power requirements. This involves installing specially developed and locally manufactured solar photovoltaic (PV) carports throughout the facility, using more than 31,000 solar panels. Covering parking bays for around 4,200 vehicles, it will be one of the largest solar carports in the world.

Ford is also addressing the dependence on precious water resources, particularly in water-scarce countries such as South Africa, as well as reducing and eventually completely phasing out its contribution of waste to landfill.

Aiming for Island Mode in 2024

According to Ockert Berry, VP of operations at FMCSA, the solar project is the first step towards achieving 'Island Mode' within the next four years. At this point, the Silverton Assembly Plant – which produces the Ford Ranger, Ranger Raptor and Everest for domestic sales and over 100 global export markets – will no longer rely on the national power grid or any municipal services.

“Our goal by 2024 is to have the Silverton plant completely energy self-sufficient and 100% carbon-neutral, using an integrated renewable and co-generation energy mix comprising solar PV, biomass, biogas and biosyngas for all our electricity, gas and heating requirements,” says Berry. “We will also be introducing 100% water recycling, and all non-fermentable waste will be repurposed through a pyrolysis system to produce syngas.

“This is a bold step that will transform our business, helping us make an important contribution to reduce our impact on the environment,” Berry states. “It will also make our Silverton Assembly Plant both more efficient and more cost-competitive.”

Aside from the environmental and cost benefits, Project Blue Oval will also bring to life Ford’s vision of job creation, starting with the domestic manufacturing of the solar carports by SolarAfrica, which will create 100 jobs locally. During the next phases which are currently being investigated, the introduction of biomass as a source of renewable energy, and the outsourced farming of fermentable biomass plants in rural areas that would support this project, will be instrumental in driving this vision forward – creating employment for a further 2,400 people.

Dealing with SA’s energy and environmental challenges

David Sonnenberg, chief technical officer of SolarAfrica and Project Blue Oval, says that the solar project is the first step towards addressing South Africa’s energy and environmental challenges.

“As we are all too well aware, South Africa is currently faced with a crippling energy crisis, coupled with the ongoing threat of load shedding, ever-increasing electricity tariffs, municipal shortage of capacity, demand charges on power, and the erratic quality of this power delivery with regard to spikes and dips,” says Sonnenberg. “For a global manufacturing operation such as Ford’s Silverton Assembly Plant, these challenges make running a facility of this scale efficiently exceptionally difficult – both in terms of the availability of reliable energy, and escalating costs.”

An added challenge is that most of South Africa’s electricity is generated through fossil fuels, and specifically from coal-fired power stations. The high level of greenhouse gases generated exacerbates the environmental damage and resulting climate change. Water is also a very precious and scarce resource in South Africa. It is too valuable to be used once only, so we have to fundamentally change the way we use and consume water, particularly for the manufacturing sector,” concludes Berry.

“Along with Ford, we share the vision of a zero-emission future, and we welcome Ford’s enthusiasm and passion in launching the solar energy project, and working towards the broader green initiatives in the future.”

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