

Wind energy testing facility set for Eastern Shore



By [Josh Brown](#)
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Wind turbines towering as high as 750 feet could soon become fixtures on the Eastern Shore.

A joint venture between two renewable-energy firms plans to build one of the first testing facilities for offshore wind turbines in Northampton County, Gov. Bob McDonnell is scheduled to announce this morning.

Poseidon Atlantic LLC plans to spend roughly \$9 million and begin construction by mid- to late-2012. The company is a joint venture between Real NewEnergy, a renewable-energy technology firm based in Rockville, Md., and Ecofys, a subsidiary of the Dutch utility company Eneco. Active in European wind-generated energy, Eneco has developed projects with more than 2,500 megawatts of capacity.

"The Poseidon Atlantic project is transformational for the future development of offshore wind technology, as there is currently a worldwide lack of facilities that are suitable for full-service certification testing of offshore wind turbine technology," McDonnell said in a news release. "The establishment right here in Northampton County of the first-ever wind energy test facility is going to further Virginia's progress as leader in the energy industry."

Poseidon is considering several sites in Northampton County and expects to settle on a location in the coming months, said Sally McNeilan, a spokeswoman for Fugro Atlantic, which has been hired to provide engineering services for the site. So far, the company has signed letters of intent with two property owners, she said.

The site, which could employ as many as 25 workers in the coming years, will serve as a test-and-certification facility for both land-based and offshore wind turbines.

Poseidon hopes to attract several wind turbine manufacturers to the facility, which will be able to accommodate eight to 10 turbines. Wind turbines could be erected as early as the beginning of 2013, each one able to produce between one and 10 megawatts of electricity, according to a news release.

The companies likened the future testing facility to a 50-megawatt wind farm, costing as much as \$120 million.

The state has high hopes for spurring wind energy development off the coast.

"If this industry takes root and matures, we could create thousands of new jobs in manufacturing, construction, logistics, operations and maintenance activities," Lt. Gov. Bill Bolling said in the news

release. "Many of these jobs are skilled positions with very competitive wages and benefits, and they would produce a sustained and long-term economic benefit for Virginia."

The Virginia Department of Mines and Minerals plans to give Poseidon \$750,000 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding to help study the project's feasibility.

The testing facility also would benefit the port of Hampton Roads, Jeff Keever, senior deputy executive director of the Virginia Port Authority, said in a news release.

"The components needed for this facility are enormous and will come to the region by vessel, and we are going to be the port that handles these vessels and cargo," Keever said. "Cargo equates to jobs and having this project in our backyard means jobs over the long-term."

The announcement comes just seven months after state regulators approved scientific surveys for a test project to build an offshore wind turbine in waters at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay.

Gamesa Energy USA LLC, a unit of a Spanish wind energy company, is studying whether conditions would allow for the construction of a single, prototype windmill that would generate as much as 5 megawatts of electricity in waters about 3 miles west of Cape Charles on the Eastern Shore.

Officials in Northampton County recently approved a change to ordinances that would allow for the construction of the wind turbines for testing.

"We're very excited," said Katie Nunez, the county administrator. "We think it has quite a bit of potential. While it is still a test facility, we think it will position our county to potentially service these turbines in the future."

Despite the height of the turbines, Nunez said, motorists may or may not be able to see them from U.S. 13.

"It depends on what site they pick," she said.

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