

# Salt can generate electricity from solar energy

Could molten salt be used in concentrated solar power plants?

Molten salt storage in concentrated solar power plants could meet the electricity-on-demand role of coal and gas, allowing more old, fossil fuel plants to retire. Sign up to receive our latest reporting on climate change, energy and environmental justice, sent directly to your inbox. [Subscribe here.](#)

Can molten salt save solar energy?

Using molten salt to capture and store heat captured from the sun promises to save solar energy for use well into the night. Reporter Rob Dieterich joins host Steve Curwood to explain why this technology can compete with natural gas-fired power and is cheaper than grid-scale battery arrays for photovoltaics.

How does SolarReserve use molten salt?

SolarReserve's Crescent Dunes plant in Nevada trains mirrors on a core tower to heat molten salt that can be used immediately to run a turbine to produce electricity, or stored to make electricity hours later. (Photo: Dennis Shroeder /National Renewable Energy Laboratory, Flickr CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Are molten salt towers the next-generation technology for solar thermal power?

Mark Mehos, thermal systems group manager at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), says molten salt towers akin to SolarReserve's are "the next-generation technology" for solar thermal power. Plants without storage may never be able to compete with PV, says Mehos.

Can molten salt be used for energy storage?

Large tracking mirrors, called heliostats, follow the sun throughout the day, reflecting and concentrating sunlight onto the top of Crescent Dunes' central tower. Molten salt's physical and thermal properties make it a particularly good candidate for energy storage.

How can MIT use sunlight to generate electricity?

An MIT team has developed a novel system for capturing and storing the sun's heat so it can be used to generate electricity whenever it's needed. The new system is simple, durable, and inexpensive. Mirrors mounted on a hillside reflect sunlight directly into a large tank of molten salt, which absorbs the heat throughout its depth.

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