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Solar ENERGY: Mankind's Nuclear Power Plant

BY MICHELLE WAHL

Solar energy is no longer the wave of the future...it is the light wave of today.

Original solar roof tiles were aesthetically unappealing and not economical. Today, a combination of federal tax incentives, state rebates, and rising energy bills suddenly make solar energy affordable and feasible.

David Saltman, President and CEO of Open Energy Corporation in San Diego shares, "I celebrate all forms of renewable energy, but from a physics standpoint, the only source that has the energy content to satisfy all of mankind's needs is from a nuclear power plant 93 million miles away...our sun!"

The solar energy industry started in 1954 when Bell Labs invented the first photovoltaic cell or PV (basically a thick slice of a silicon or semi-conductor material which converts sunlight into electricity). Today, solar energy is an

infinite resource, which is barely being tapped. In 2004, the solar PV was a \$6.5 billion dollar industry. Predictions estimate the industry to hit \$18.5 billion dollars by 2010. Government grants and tax incentives, such as the recently enacted U.S. Energy Bill, help place the U.S. at third in the world for solar energy usage following Japan and Germany.

According to Saltman, "California alone installed 75 megawatts of solar PV and, in 2005, passed the largest solar funding initiative in US history." By 2010, legislation may require solar energy to be a major contender for meeting California's growing energy demands with an initiative to push for one million homes to have solar power.

Economic and environmental benefits derive from solar energy. By installing solar panels, a home can look at fixed energy prices over the next 20 years compared to the rollercoaster fees one pays today on oil, gas and grid electricity. Technology has evolved and high efficiency systems are available from a number of suppliers. Today,



solar tiles are multiple tank products, class A fire rated, UL approved, wind certified and part of the building material. The tiles actually match the color and edge profiles of traditional tiles used in San Diego. Instead of two different trays or retrofit, roofing contractors can install the solar system as a complete roof. The cost can also be rolled into your mortgage. This is an additional \$15,000 to \$20,000 value when the homeowner sells. The initial payback for the cost usually is covered within 5 to 7 years. As prices increase, your investment continues for another 20 years! California provides up to 50 percent savings on the system's total purchase price with a \$2.20 per watt rebate.

"Open Energy inspires us to think more expansively about the unlimited nature of energy," said Saltman. "Every hour of every day, enough solar energy falls on our planet to meet humankind's entire annual power requirements. There is no scarcity of energy, only our limited imaginations and technical ability to harness it. We must move beyond petroleum if we are to realize a bright common future for humankind."

Environmentally, we all understand the air pollution added to the environment by the burning of fossil fuels. Natural habitats are often destroyed while drilling for oil, gas and coal. The carbon dioxide emissions absorbed into our oceans cause ocean temperatures to rise and the ocean chemistry to change. Plants are stressed to absorb more pollution as forests are cut and burned. By utilizing solar power, a person contributes to lessening dependence on foreign oil. Big energy companies such as BP, Shell, GE, Sharp, and Siemens, are a few who have shifted to making significant investments in energy alternatives like wind, solar, bio-fuel, and hydrogen. Today renewable energy is one of the most rapidly growing sectors of the global economy. ■

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California Center for Sustainable Energy www.sdrea.org

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