

TO SOLARIZE AND ECONOMIZE! By Lynn Bishop of EaCOE

Alternative power or “renewable energy” is not only an option for environmentally conscious individuals but also for anyone who is concerned with the future of electricity prices. Systems are becoming more and more affordable and more and more user friendly. Installing renewable energy systems provide a fixed utility cost to you, reduce your impact on the earth, and provide lasting comfort and convenience.

Pay back time ranges from 1 (solar hot water) year to 15 years or more (wind power). Generally Solar Hot water systems have the quickest pay back. This is a system where the sun actually heats your water. A solar collection loop can be added to an existing hot water system or be integrated into a new installation. These systems can pay for themselves within 3 to 5 years through reduced utility bills.

If you are installing a solar hot water system you may want to consider a radiant heat floor. You can do this easily as a retrofit and if your building a new home than you absolutely must consider it!! Radiant heat is just running warm water through pipes in the floor. This heats the house in a wonderfully constant and reliable way. In this case your payback is really fast and you can quickly start counting the money your saving.

Solar Power is another renewable energy system that is becoming increasingly popular. All you need is a sunny roof, so its is easy to retrofit your home in an urban or rural setting. These systems involve more infrastructure and have a slower payback time, but with electricity prices being as unreliable as they are these systems can give you some sense of your monthly and annual payments well into the future. Legislation is also changing and it is quite feasible to tie into the grid and actually turn your meter backwards.

Wind is probably one of the more expensive renewable energy options but if you have a windy site, then it may be one of the smartest decisions you can make. There are small wind turbines on the market that provide 500 Watts with which you can power all your lights and other small utilities. The next size up is about 1 Kilowatt and it can actually provide about 30 percent of a normal houses needs.

With the rising cost of fossil fuels and the environmental problems we are facing globally, alternative energy systems are definitely worth considering!!

All this said- the single most important thing you can do for the environment, and you pocket book, is to IMPROVE OUR ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Energy efficiency means using less energy to accomplish the same task. The most economic way to reduce your energy consumption is by converting to energy efficient appliances, and being conscious of how you consume electricity. Even small changes can make big differences; a single 100-watt bulb replaced with a 25-watt screw-in compact fluorescent can save you over \$75 on your power bill over the life of the bulb.

There is an excellent program in the Erin/ Hillsburgh area which can help homeowners identify where their energy losses are and how to make their homes more energy efficient. It is called the **Guelph Residential Energy Efficiency Project** and it is a project of the Elora Centre for Environmental Excellence. This service has a cost but your payback time will surely be shortest of all.

To learn more about Renewable Energy Systems consider talking a hands on workshop at the Everdale Environmental Learning Centre (www.everdale.org or 519-855-4859).

To find out how to make your hose more energy efficient contact: Guelph REEP guelph@thereep.ca