

A hot topic – harnessing solar energy

Earth First

By Tony Smith, ECCO

Six years ago we put six photo-voltaic solar panels on the roof of our house in Nashdale. They cost us about \$6000 after the Federal Government subsidy, and although the rebates we received from our energy supplier were small (about \$20 a quarter) we knew we were doing the right thing.

Then we realised that although our electricity rebate wasn't substantial, we were in fact saving much more – we generated about 1000KWh hours (KWh) a year which meant that we were NOT purchasing around \$170 worth of electricity. Not much in the scheme of things – my son pointed out that we'd be dead twenty years before we paid for the installation – but it was a saving all the same.

Then we sold our house and moved into town and promptly installed another eight panels on our house in Hill Street. Again we were entitled to a subsidy and made good use of it. The equation was much the same – not much of a rebate, totalling \$615 over three years (when the value of an exported KWh varied from 13 to 19 cents) but in the course of those three years we have generated 3280 KWh of electricity.

Since then we have been generating about 6.5KWh on a good sunny day and between 2-3 KWh on an overcast day. This has saved us about \$500 on electricity NOT purchased from our energy supplier.

Then the magic letter arrived. From January 1 the NSW Government's Feed-In Tariff Scheme comes into effect, and we will soon expect to be paid 60 cents per KWh – but only for metered power – so we will have to install a special meter to measure power created by our panels, which we expect will cost a few hundred dollars. We quickly calculated that this would allow us to get three times the rebate and therefore make this choice worthwhile.

It took us a while to work out how to apply for the meter installation. We were eventually directed to the Fair Trading website (www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au) where we could find a list of licensed electrical installers. There were 57 pages of listed electricians, but luckily they were listed according to postcode area. We extracted some Orange electrical installers and rang one – YES, they would come and give us a quote but the meters were not expected to be available until March and they don't know what they'll cost!

So, while we wait for our meter to arrive and be fitted, we have time to ponder our decision. Say we create 150 KWh of electricity per month (we expect to produce more) that would translate into a rebate of \$90 per month or \$1080 across a full year. This will

only commence after installation of our magic meter – until then we will only receive 60 cents per KWh – but at last the system will start to pay for itself.

So the answer to a common question – Yes, it is worth installing photo-voltaic solar panels, provided the NSW tariff remains at 60 cents or higher. And you will be doing your bit for the environment.

For further information see:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/energyefficiency/index.html> and
<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/climatechange/emissioninitiatives.htm>

Sustainable tip for the week: Install a solar, natural gas or electric heat pump hot water system to lower energy bills and reduce the single largest source of greenhouse emissions in the household

Future events

Clean Up Australia Day, Sunday March 7. From 10am to 2pm with a BBQ from 12 noon.
Meet at Anson Street Netball courts.