

Solar for London

Summary

Solar for London (SFL) is a five-year programme that is installing solar water heating systems in London houses. By increasing the number of installations in the city, the project aims to help reduce carbon emissions, and to reduce the number of people living in 'fuel poverty'- those who are unable to keep their houses adequately warm at reasonable cost.

Solar for London began in September 2002, and in the first year, focused on private households, making 29 installations. This latest part of the project will concentrate on social housing, targeting both housing providers and their tenants.

SFL raises awareness of solar water heating systems and their suitability for the London climate. At the same time it offers a service that provides advice and technical information, guidance on potential sources of funding, and then introductions to a network of accredited manufacturers and installers.

SFL is run by Sustainable Energy Action Ltd, an independent, not-for-profit company whose aim is to promote the sustainable use and supply of energy.

The organisation

SEA is an independent, not-for-profit company that is dedicated to environmental protection and social equity. Specifically, it aims to promote the uptake of sources of renewable energy, and to advance the efficient use of energy in London's buildings and transport systems. It focuses on Southwark, where it is based, but its projects work across London.

Apart from the SFL project, SEA is also actively involved in encouraging eco-friendly building techniques in new buildings, and establishing energy efficiency measures in existing buildings. It is a registered consultant for the Carbon Trust's 'Action Energy' campaign, and a satellite Energy Efficiency Advice Centre for the Energy Saving Trust. As such, it runs energy and environmental audits on both private homes and businesses.

SEA also has an active 'bio-fuels' research programme, and has started an innovative 'walking bus' scheme that takes young children to and from school. Parents work in a rota, to 'top and tail' the line of children that are 'the walking bus'. The 'bus' moves along safe routes, designated by SEA in conjunction with the local council, and picks up or delivers children en-route. A trolley is used to carry the children's school bags.

SEA is in the process of merging with RENU (Renewable Energy in the Urban Environment), a charity working in Southwest London. RENU is an environmental charity working to inspire and enable people to use resources in a sustainable way.

Address: SFL Project, Sustainable Energy Action Ltd,
42 Braganza Street,
London SE17 3RJ

Telephone: +44 (0) 20 7820 3156

Email: PaulaK@sustainable-energy.org.uk

Website: www.solarforlondon.org, www.sustainable-energy.org.uk

Context

The need for this project is twofold. Fuel poverty is estimated to be affecting almost half a million people in London, and if the greenhouse effect is to be curbed, carbon dioxide emissions must be reduced.

Between 50% and 70% of the annual hot water needs of an average house in the UK can be met by solar water heating systems. Heating water accounts for about 20% of a home's energy needs, so at a minimum, 10% of a house's overall annual energy requirement can be met by using solar water heating. This represents a substantial financial saving, and will also save half a tonne of carbon emissions per household per year.

Until the advent of the SFL project there was no initiative in London that provided a complete solar service, from initial enquiry to installation. SFL gives unbiased advice and only uses manufacturers and installers that meet its strict standards.

Technology and use

SFL's social housing project works with both housing providers and their tenants. It aims to inspire and inform both, so that tenants feel able to ask their landlords for solar water heating and housing providers know that funding support is available. The project responds directly to requests from both tenants and housing providers. It designs potential solar water systems, arranges for companies to make quotes and then assists with drafting budgets and writing grant applications.

The UK Department of Trade and Industry is running a Clear Skies Initiative that will subsidise installations for both domestic and social housing. This is a £10 million project that will fund up to 50% of installation costs for a social housing project, (up to a maximum of £100,000), and between £500 and £5,000 for private domestic installations. In addition, there are 11 London Boroughs who have a limited number of 'Solar Rewards', of between £100 and £500, to offer domestic customers.

A requirement of the 'Clear Skies' initiative is that all products and installers used must be accredited by the Department of Trade and Industry. SFL has established its own project standards, which are in line with the DTI requirements. The project is now working with nine installation companies and six solar manufacturers, all of whom meet SFL's standards in order to be accredited for work with the organisation.

All installers that work with SFL must agree to pay a 'lead fee' to the project for each introduction they are given. This is £100 per domestic installation, and a variable percentage of the total installation cost for social housing installations. Installers are willing to pay these fees as SFL does much of the initial work for them, such as visiting social housing sites and checking their suitability for solar, and screening domestic customers by taking them through a detailed questionnaire on the telephone.

Management, finance and partnerships

SFL was established with £88,000 from the Energy Saving Trust's innovative 'Carbon Reduction Scheme'. In the first year, this money was used to set up the project and to work with private householders. It was also partly used to cover a delay in availability of funds from the DTI 'Clear Skies' Initiative. The project had set a target of making 200 domestic installations in the first year. In fact it was only able to make a total of 29, and with hindsight, SEA now know how important it is to set realistic targets.

The grant that SEA received from the Energy Saving Trust was to be used for making installations in domestic houses. The Ashden Award has enabled SFL to begin working with the social housing sector. The award money has been used to prepare detailed technical presentations on solar water heating that show that it is a sound and proven technology. Presentations have been made to housing associations, landlord forums and the housing departments of councils. The project is now collaborating with 29 London boroughs, and London Electricity plc.

This report is based on information provided to the Ashden Awards judges by SEA, and findings from a visit by one of the judges to see their work.

The Ashden Awards has taken all reasonable care to ensure that the information contained in this report is full and accurate. However, no warranty or representation is given by The Ashden Awards that the information contained in this report is free from errors or inaccuracies. To the extent permitted by applicable laws, The Ashden Awards accepts no liability for any direct, indirect or consequential damages however caused resulting from reliance on the information contained in this report.