

Release Date: Oct 09, 2007

Embargo Date: None

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### Eskom solar subsidies to reduce peak demand

The much-promised, long-awaited solar power subsidy to be offered by Eskom is set to see the light of day towards the end of the year, promising rebates of up to 30% on the installation of solar water heaters. The plan is to install up to 1 million solar-powered water heaters over five years, to the tune of some R2 billion.\* This major commitment from Eskom is both welcome and fitting, bearing in mind that, by its own admission, South Africa "has the highest solar radiation levels in the world."\*\*

Furthermore, with water heating taking up 30% of the national electricity bill, the decision to harness solar energy to reduce that could not have been too difficult. The problem has been cost. Solar power generation does not come cheap, partly because currently the market is so small and much of the technology is imported. A solar water heater such as those produced by Hotmix of Paarl, will typically cost 30% to 40% more to install than a conventional electric-only geyser. So currently you have to be seriously committed to tackling global warming to invest in one.

Furthermore, on a macro scale, it is also hard for solar-generated power to compete with cheap, local coal-fired power - dirty though it may be. Hence the subsidies - an incentive for both individual householders and the country as a whole to harness an abundant resource and reduce CO2 emissions at the same time (solar power is carbon neutral, once the equipment is installed).

On an even larger scale, the fate of the much-discussed concentrated solar power (CSP) plant being considered for the Northern Cape - where sun shines most reliably of all - will be decided by the end of this year. This significant capital commitment - the plant will cost a lot more than a conventional power station at perhaps R3 billion - also signals a very real and long-term commitment to solar power.

In the meantime, companies like Hotmix, a manufacturer of the internationally patented Xstream<sup>TM</sup> range of electric and solar hot water cylinders, have been supplying commercial and domestic customers with solar power for several years. The Xstream<sup>TM</sup> range of boilers is uniquely designed: all are solar adaptable as standard and are made from a unique Epoxy-vinyl ester composite inner called Derakane<sup>TM</sup>. This makes them completely corrosion-free, naturally insulated, low maintenance and extremely light. In addition, the smoothly tapered and slim cylinders can easily be fitted through trap doors for installation. They can also be installed inside or out, their electrical boxes being fully waterproof.

To prove the benefits of their products, Hotmix has also involved itself in helping out the Niall Mellon Township Trust housing initiative in Fairyland in Paarl. This project has seen 130 of the planned 600 houses go up over the last year. But the area in question, once informal housing, has a limited amount of electricity available.

Paarl-based Hotmix came to the rescue with a top-of-the-range top quality Xstream<sup>TM</sup> solar water heater for each house, no expense spared, fitted free and supplied at cost. Now each of the new houses has the very latest solar water heater installed and need not rely on electric power at all. Of course, when it does come, the water heaters are designed to be connected to mains power straight away. In the meantime, Fairyland householders are leading the way in terms of renewable energy use in this area. "And", says Dawie Thirion, outspoken Xstream<sup>TM</sup> CEO, "they're getting the best quality materials in their homes, unlike some developments not too far from the N2..."

Hotmix intends to continue assisting the project as it expands over the coming years, supplying additional heaters for new homes and ongoing advice and support for new homeowners.

Thirion continues: "Unlike other companies, we felt we should contribute to this project in a way that made most sense to us and maximised the input of our skills and product quality. Many of these people had access only to cold water before, and only then from a standpipe. We wanted to make the quality provision of hot water in each house a reality - the icing on the cake being that, once installed, our water heaters cost nothing to run and require precious little maintenance. Indeed, they are run by the sun."

Thirion is very excited, too, about the wider commitment that Government is making to solar power - and solar water heating in particular. He hopes that one day soon all new housing will automatically have solar water heaters installed in them. In this regard, the City of Cape Town has already committed to making them mandatory on all new homes in the long term, with a short-term commitment to fitting them to 10% of houses by 2010.

Finally, it looks as if the tide is turning and the sun is really coming out to play the major role in our future that it should.

NOTES TO THE EDITOR: Xstream<sup>TM</sup> boilers are built under licence by Hotmix of Paarl in the Western Cape but their Sales and After Sales Service is nationwide. All boilers are SABS approved and conform to ISO 9001:2000. They range in size from 50l to 200l and weigh between 13kg and 29kg. Element power ranges from 1KW to 3KW. The company offers installation training courses for plumbers and is an accredited member of both the Central Energy Fund and SESSA (the Sustainable Energy Society of Southern Africa).

\*'Sunny side up' by Kevin Davie: Mail & Guardian 3rd June 2007.

\*\*[www.eskom.co.za](http://www.eskom.co.za)

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