

SA Business moves to backup plans as power crisis continues

South African enterprises are moving toward multi-faceted power plans as the power crisis shows no sign of coming to an end in the foreseeable future, say power sector experts on the POWER-GEN Africa Advisory Board.

Bertha Dlamini, Managing Director of EON Consulting and a member of the POWER-GEN Africa Advisory Board, says EON's consultants are seeing a significant increase in the number of local enterprises taking a multi-faceted approach to dealing with the power problem.

"Our clients are looking at a combination of energy efficiency technologies and alternative energy solutions to help reduce their dependence on Eskom. Most enterprises cannot move completely off the grid, but they are installing backup power solutions such as generators for load shedding, and renewable energy solutions to supplement their power supplies."

Many shopping malls and office blocks that installed generators during the power crisis of 2008 are now considering renewables and more cost-effective alternatives as the fuel price looks set to rise, which would impact on the cost of running generators, she adds.

However, there are pros and cons to all alternative energy sources. "While generators are quick and easy to install, the long-term cost of a heavy reliance on generators can be high, and is dependent on the oil price and its impact on the price of petrol and diesel. Solar power has a relatively high initial cost which takes time to deliver an ROI, and it depends on sunny weather. Therefore it cannot be the only solution for enterprises with high power requirements and a need for a reliable supply. So most businesses are considering blended solutions," she says.

Dlamini notes that the first step to reducing the impact of the power crisis is to improve the energy efficiency of power users. "By introducing minimal energy efficiency solutions such as occupancy sensors, lighting automation, load shifting and solar solutions, companies can immediately reduce their power consumption by between 10 and 20%," she says.

Effective change management programmes could bring about an immediate reduction in pressure on the grid, she says.

The POWER-GEN Africa and DistribuTECH Africa conference and exhibition bring together regional and international power sector leaders for the most comprehensive event serving Sub-Saharan Africa's electricity sector. Under the theme 'Emerging Opportunities in the World's Fastest Growing Continent', this year's event will be staged from 15 – 17 July at the International Convention Centre in Cape Town.

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