



Darling residents get solar water heaters

The Western Cape's Department of Environmental Affairs and Planning awarded the contract to supply and install solar water heating to a number of community members in Darling, Western Cape, to Citrine Solar and their supplier, Solar Distributors Africa (SDA). The Department has set a goal of 14% renewable energy by 2014 and impoverished communities, who often have no access to hot water, will benefit greatly from this type of project, according to Tony Geldenhuys, a Director of Citrine Solar.

"This project increases the provincially subsidised installations to a total of 1300 solar water heaters in the households of indigent communities across the Western Cape," said Provincial Minister of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, Anton Bredell.

"Many of the recipients were for the first time afforded the opportunity of having instant hot water in their homes after the installation of the 150 litre, high pressure, flatbed collector solar water heaters," said Geldenhuys.

"The first phase of the project took place in March and April 2010 and the final installations were completed in October 2010," says Geldenhuys. The large project consisted of 540 units being installed in low-cost housing units in the area.



Anton Pretorius, a director at SDA explains that Project Darling, as the company likes to call the endeavour, was more than merely a solar water heating installation and that the local community received other benefits from the project. "When we commissioned the project, we made a concerted effort to leave more than just solar hot water behind," says Pretorius.

"At the start of Phase 1 we trained 14 local community members skills ranging from pipe bending to soldering. Those people were then employed for the duration of the contract. Their initial contribution was that of assistant to the team of qualified plumbers we had on site. As their confidence grew, they eventually took over and they completed the final 100 units of Phase 1 under supervision," says Pretorius.

"While we were waiting for the second phase to commence, we employed two of the original trained community locals to oversee all maintenance issues and queries that the new recipients of the solar water heaters may have," says Pretorius.

Bredell commented on the training initiatives: "The installation of these units significantly impacted on the living environment of the households, while at the same time impacting on the livelihood of fourteen community members who were trained to assist with installations during the project, subsequently addressing the skills gap in the solar water heater industry. One of the trainees has been contracted by the service provider to perform maintenance on the solar water heaters in the community over a contractual period."

Limited funds and challenges

During the second phase of the project, the Western Cape's Department of Environmental Affairs announced that they would not have sufficient funds to provide the rest of the remaining homes with solar water heaters and that only another 100 homes would be able to receive solar water heating. "Citrine and SDA decided to join forces and contribute in excess of R450 000 to provide each home with a high quality solar water heater," said Pretorius. "We believe that each and every community member deserved to have a basic need such as warm water provided for."

"Our generous contribution allowed all the people to benefit. Testimony to the fact that training and empowering can make a difference is the fact that Phase 2 was completed with the now experienced installers in a record time of 4 weeks. Besides the basic training and equipment we provided, SDA and Citrine also planted 100 indigenous trees for the local community," concludes Pretorius.



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Free State based supplier part of the solar network

AC Solar Power, which forms part of the larger ACS Group, is a Free State based company that designs and installs new solar water heating systems, air-conditioning units and ventilation systems. The ACS Group was founded 12 years ago and has branches in the Free State, Northern Cape, Cape Town and Durban.

Besides new installations, the company also analyses existing systems to make them more energy-efficient and they also install heat pump solutions for swimming pools. ACS focuses primarily on servicing the hospitality industry.

The company joined the SDA network and supplies the SDA product range on behalf of the SDA in Bloemfontein. Deon Brits, AC Solar Power Director, says that SDA products conform to the applicable manufacturing standards the network urges all their solar water heater dealers to adhere to the highest installation standards.

"AC Solar Power and SDA strive to supply the best products and right solar solutions for the clients," says AC Solar Power Director, Deon Brits. The benefits of belonging to the SDA network are:

- Offer a range of ESKOM-accredited solar water heating products.
- Access to accredited training courses.
- Top-quality products with SABS mark of approval.

- Well-trained and qualified staff.
- Technical back-up when required.

"AC Solar Power did several solar installations to increase efficient energy-savings for the Protea Hotel Group countrywide, which includes the Protea Hotels at OR Tambo International Airport, Mafikeng, Nelspruit, Bloemfontein, Willow Lake, Kimberley and the Protea Hotel Fire & Ice in Cape Town," continues Brits. ACS also supplied and installed energy-efficient air-conditioning equipment that achieved savings of 30% – 40% on electrical costs at these sites.

"We are in a position to supply full installation and service teams on any mechanical installation to the hospitality industry," concludes Brits.

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