

Solar water heaters - get that rebate now

At present, Eskom has a rebate offer on accredited solar water heating systems which could save consumers up to 40% of their electricity bill. Eskom issues the rebates in cash once an SABS approved solar system has been installed and the rebates are calculated according to the amount of power the system saves the user in heating water. Selection of the correct system is therefore of paramount importance.

By [Graham Mundy](#) 12 May 2010

The rebate system has catalysed a significant spike in the demand for solar water heating products and in some cases, increasing levels of consumer confusion around which solar heating service providers and products to choose and why.

One of the most important things from the consumer's perspective is to realise that the subsidy will be reduced annually and will not last forever. Given South Africa's spiralling electricity prices, consumers should realise that the window of opportunity that currently exists is very positive and should be taken advantage of.

As electricity prices soar, the rebate reinforces the financial logic behind installing a solar water heating system, which can save users a significant portion of their electricity bill. The growth of the general sector is very positive for the country, despite the many industry scare stories appearing in the media, as sensible, informed consumers can dramatically reduce their electricity bill through solar water heating.

Three selection tips

1. Vet suppliers

Two years ago, there were only nine solar water heating companies in South Africa and now there are well over 300, illustrating how the industry has expanded overnight, giving the consumer a vast array of choice. With so many new players on the market, the risk of being caught by a flyby night operator does exist. Like any other major purchase decision, consumers have a responsibility to do their homework and it is advisable to select suppliers, who have been in business for a longer period than their guarantee.

When selecting a supplier, reasonable caution and general common sense should do the trick. Only companies with an SABS mark of approval, guaranteeing continued quality should be chosen. The mark is quite different to a compliance test certificate.

2. Choose correct technology

Some solar technologies, like glass tubes, for example, were developed and designed for European conditions, and there have been reports of these technologies failing in Southern Africa. Sometimes such failures can be dangerous and in general, the optimum route is to utilise technologies developed for local conditions. Logically the best route is to make sure the supplier is using a system developed for harsh, hot Southern Hemisphere conditions. Many local products have been tried and tested and are ranked among the best in the world.

3. Do not connect electric geysers to solar panel

Beware of suppliers who advocate that electric geysers should be connected directly to solar panels, as this is an extremely poor practice and should not be considered for the following reasons:

- A standard geyser is 25% less efficient in terms of insulation than a solar geyser;
- The basic design of a normal geyser is not designed to connect to a solar collector;
- The element in a normal geyser is at the bottom of the tank, which is in the incorrect position. This means that every day will start with a full tank of electrically heated water making the need for solar generated heat redundant

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graham Mundy is founder of solar water heating company Solar Beam which was established in 1978. Since then it has developed major industrial solar water heating solutions for many Southern and Central African companies and has serviced many South African domestic, commercial and industrial installations. It manufactures and utilises SABS mark approved flat plate technology, guaranteeing a tried and tested Africa-appropriate solution.

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