

Use of solar power heats up

By Brandi Schlossberg

It may seem progressive, but the concept of solar power — gleaming power from the sun — is nothing new.

“The Indian tribes of the southwest United States designed their caves to take advantage of the sun,” said John Hargrove, energy efficiency and conservation program manager for Sierra Pacific Power. “The Romans used solar in a big way, too.”

Today, with the advent of photovoltaic solar panels, it’s possible to generate electricity directly from light, allowing people to live remotely “off-grid” or to consume less energy from a home in the suburbs or the city.

“PV certainly has become more widespread in the last 20 years,” Hargrove said. “Nevada is the No. 1 state in the country in terms of solar energy per capita.”

Advances in solar technology, such as solar shingles and ballasted panels, which are not overly visible, have boosted the use of solar, along with increasing awareness of our planet’s strained resources.

“Generating energy with solar reduces our need

for fossil fuel,” Hargrove said. “You can create energy right on the roof of your home or business.”

Creating your own energy equates to saving money, which no doubt has played a role in the rise of solar energy.

“As the price [of installing a solar system] continues to come down, more and more people will go solar,” Hargrove said.

In 2003, the Nevada Legislature launched a solar-rebate program, now known as SolarGenerations, to offset the current cost of going solar and to encourage more people to do so.

“It’s my opinion that the incentives are critical to affording an individual consumer the opportunity to meaningfully participate in his or her energy future,” said Commissioner Rebecca Wagner of the Public Utilities Commission of Nevada.

For 2008, homeowners who install PV systems are eligible for a rebate of \$2.50 per watt, with a maximum capacity of 1,000 kilowatts. According to Wagner, qualified applicants are selected by the Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation Task Force.

GO GREEN, SAVE GREEN WITH SOLAR

Nevada’s SolarGenerations rebate program offers money back to homeowners, small businesses, schools, and public and nonprofit entities that install photovoltaic solar systems.

- Homeowners and small businesses may receive \$2.50 per watt, with a maximum capacity of 1,000 kilowatts.
- Schools may receive \$5 per watt, with a maximum capacity of 2,000 kilowatts.
- Public and nonprofit entities may receive \$5 per watt, with a maximum capacity of 760 kilowatts.

Applicants must meet certain requirements to qualify, and participation is limited. For more information on solar power, as well as the rebate program, visit www.solargenerations.com.

“In addition to the solar-rebate program, homeowners and small businesses may participate in net metering,” she said.

Net metering allows homeowners and businesses with renewable-energy systems to deliver any excess power they create to the utility for a credit against their monthly power bills.

Saving natural resources and money in one fell swoop, it’s no wonder solar power is hot. 