

Valletta solar panels

Photovoltaic panels to generate solar energy are mushrooming on our roofs. Alongside the army of cell phone masts, satellite dishes and solar water heaters. There are government support schemes to encourage us to install. But before we speak to the salesmen, and there are around 30 plus firms in the sector here now, what do we need to know?

Charles Yousif of the Institute of Sustainable Energy at the University of Malta and also Secretary General of the Malta Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energies Association, answers FAQs on the whole photovoltaic trend. Charles entitled his answers: 'Photovoltaics: Today's Energy Choice for Future Energy Savings'; as while you won't have a totally zero electricity bill with photovoltaics, you won't be at the mercy, as much, of price hikes in fossil fuel produced electricity. Essential reading for homeowners thinking green.

Q. How should one go about finding a PV system? As it stands today, many customers go and get quotations from different suppliers, choose the cheapest and apply for the maximum grant of EUR3,000. This is absolutely wrong because the available roof area may not be large enough to accommodate all the panels that you need. The approach should be to evaluate the potentially un-shaded area on the roof first. Then, get quotes.

Q. Do you mean that one would only save 3.5 units of electricity from this system that is occupying 50 m²? No, tests carried out in Malta showed that every 1 kWp of photovoltaic system would produce a long-term average of 1,460 kWh/year. Hence a 3.5 kWp would produce 5,110 units of electricity per year or a daily average of 14 units. The long-term result also caters for the fact that solar systems degrade in performance by about 1% per year.

Q. Will my electricity bill be near zero if I have the optimum photovoltaic system in place? Let's not give the impression that what matters is ONLY the bill, because even if the bill is zero, you still have to fork out the rent of the meter.

It is impossible to claim or give guarantees that a combination of a solar water heater and the right number of PV panels will bring the bill down to zero, because the panels do not produce the same amount of energy everyday due to the seasonal and daily variations of the sun's energy. In Malta, we are no longer talking about net metering (although it is still possible to opt for that). We are now talking about feed-in tariff, which implies that you sell what is generated and buy from Enemalta what you need. So really you are still buying from Enemalta all the same

It also does not make sense to produce more than you consume, because there is an upper limit beyond which Enemalta will buy the electricity at a much lower price.

Photo: Courtesy Carlos Lorenzo

More on Barcelona's solar useBarcelona & Solar Energy: for more on the city's impressive promotion and use of solar energy, click here.

Further InformationThe Institute for Sustainable Energies offers a technical inspection of installed, domestic, solar water heaters and photovoltaic systems. For an appointment, call Eur. Ing. Charles Yousif on 2165 0675. See the Institute's site for details too.Malta Resources Authority (MRA) operates government's support schemes including subsidies for first-time installation of domestic solar water heaters and for photovoltaic panels.

Well said, but people need to understand that adding Solar to their property is an asset that could improve the future valuation of their home if / when they choose to sell. With the environment the way it is going we are unable to underestimate any product or service that provides zero cost energy at no cost to both the customer and more notably the earth!

Very enlightening. UOM should prepare students of elec.engineering to repair/construct inverters as a future technical requirement. Plasma cutters using inverters(much lighter version than the transformer types) also might come into this. I believe that I will have a hard time fixing mine when it goes bust. Any comments will be appreciated. Tony

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