

# Accreditation sees clients a step closer to solar heating

SVEN CARLSSON

AN Eastern Bay company has obtained accreditation by the Solar Industries Association allowing it to help customers with getting interest-free loans when installing solar heating.

Energy Options consultant Charles Wilke said the accreditation, along with the government's offer of interest-free loans, served to tidy up the industry and spread the use of this renewable-resource heating.

"The industry suffered in the 70s when everyone jumped on the bandwagon. Installations weren't done to standard and, as a result, the industry got a bad reputation. Under-specified units meant customers were left unhappy."

Modern solar heaters were less damage-prone and more efficient, using a heat exchanger approach where a closed system picked up the heat from the sunlight and then transferred it to the water supply of the house.

"The tubes are frostproof and can be replaced one at a time in case something should fall on them," Mr Wilke said.

"The tube arrangement also captures virtually no wind."

There were cheaper systems around, using the old plates, but these were not as good.

"It's false economy. They might get damaged by frost,



**KEEPING WARM:** Sue Room, Manu Miskell, and Charles Wilke of Energy Options have to rely on their smiles to power the solar unit on one of the few rainy days in Whakatane.

Photo Lisa Castle B0585-11

which is quite common around here."

Installation requirements and procedures were part of the accreditation, as was ensuring purchasers got maximum efficiency by positioning the unit correctly.

"It takes a day to install, provided you don't have to strengthen the roof or some-

thing."

A certified and specially trained plumber did the installation while an electrician installed required pumps, Mr Wilke said.

"A SIA representative will come and check on us twice a year, to verify that all installations are up to scratch."

The Energy Options compa-

ny is owned by the Eastern Bay Energy Trust and apart from solar heating assists with house and hot water system insulation, and also sells efficient wood burners that use sawdust as fuel.

"Sawdust is a waste product, but here it's been packed into pellets that burn very efficiently," Mr Wilke said.

## Accreditation

SOLAR Industries Association's executive officer Brian Cox said that newly accredited Energy Options would be able to give their clients direct access to the government-subsidised finance, established in a bid to stimulate the solar heating industry.

Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority spokeswoman Anna Warren said purchasers of solar heating gained access to the help by filling in an application form that the accredited seller had. If the application was accepted, the purchaser bought the equipment with an interest-free loan, provided by the government.

"The purchasers can then use the money they save on their heating bill to pay off the loan," Ms Warren said.

## Loans available

LOANS are allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis from a limited fund.

Solar water heating systems generally cost between \$4000 and \$7000 – and under the programme you are able to borrow all or most of this amount, but lending terms are as follows: a \$7450 loan for an interest-free term of 12 months will require \$620.83 in monthly repayments; \$4500 over 18 months \$250; \$4000 over 24 months, \$166.67 per month.

It is estimated that a solar heating system can cut the hot water bill by 75 per cent.

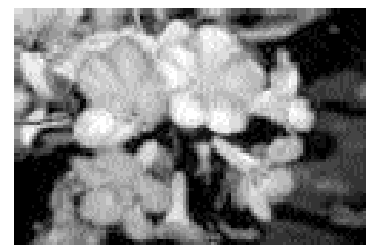
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