

WILL SOLAR POWER WORK FOR CANADA?

Every day people in Canada hear on the news about the high cost of electricity and its production and the problems with the environment.

One way to deal with both is to use alternative power sources. These include solar, wind, tidal and hydro. The focus here is on solar.

There have been Canadians who have used solar power on an individual basis for years. They have found it to be practical in their lives and homes and to meet their needs. Having solar power in individual houses is a good thing, and a good start. For a bigger impact in clean energy it needs to be on a larger scale.

The question then becomes is it feasible for Canada, as a nation, to start using more solar power? The answer to that question is a resounding yes. Despite the preconceived notions of many non-Canadians that it is a country covered in snow, trees, mountains and polar bears that isn't the way Canada really is. There are plenty of places that get more than enough sunshine to power thousands of homes. Southern Ontario, Quebec and the Prairies are excellent places for large scale solar farms.

In fact, the world's largest solar farm is in Sarnia, Ontario and provides power to more than 12,000 homes. This is because Ontario government has a cutting edge program called FIT, or Feed-in-Tariff. This program was made to encourage people to develop renewable energy sources on both a small and large scale. With this kind of encouragement it isn't surprising that solar power usage in Ontario is on the rise.



Probably the best place in Canada to use solar power would be in the small northern villages and towns. Most people in those towns and villages rely on diesel for fuel and heating oil for heat. Those prices are already high and they only get higher when adding in the price of transportation. That means that people are very careful about their electricity usage. If a shipment of diesel can't make it to town there will be people using less electricity because there won't be enough fuel for municipal or personal generators.

Solar is a good alternative in this situation. Part of that is because the power generated by the solar panels get stored in batteries. It doesn't go straight into the house's wiring. This means that power that is in the battery could have been produced hours or even days prior. Depending on the amount of panels and what their power ratings are, batteries can be filled in as little as a couple of hours. While the panels do need clear access to the sky, even weak sunlight can create power. In those areas it would be necessary to angle the panels to take the most advantage the Sun, no matter the season.

In the past most of the solar power use in Canada hasn't gone into the production of power, but into things like drying wood and heating water. That is starting to change and Canada is rapidly becoming one of the world's leaders in the use of solar power.

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