

NEWS

From GEORGIA TECH'S ENGINEERING EXPERIMENT STATION

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GEORGIA TECH RESEARCHERS
TO ENCOURAGE SOLAR USE

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For Immediate Release

ATLANTA, GA....Georgia Tech researchers will make the case for solar energy in a series of visits to textile and food processing plants around the state this year.

The six-month project is sponsored by the Southern Solar Energy Center, located in Atlanta. In their industrial visits, Tech engineers will encourage managers to consider solar systems in future energy program planning.

They will tell manufacturers that while short range benefits for solar use in industry may not be economically favorable yet, long-term investments look considerably more promising.

"Energy prices have been increasing 20 percent a year since 1973 and last year costs were up 37.4 percent," said project director James L. Clark of Tech's Engineering Experiment Station. "When you start recognizing that fuel bills are going to keep rising, solar energy, which is expensive but won't get more expensive, starts to look attractive."

Clark said solar energy systems which are now commercially viable for residential heating may be used directly in some industrial processes. However, many manufacturing processes require much higher temperatures than these systems presently can deliver.

Technology exists for solar systems with greater heat capability, but only in a few cases are the short term financial benefits good. Nonetheless, when the cost of the solar equipment is compared to the expected expense of

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conventional energy over the life of the system, the economic picture changes decidedly for the better.

"As prices go up, solar will become economically viable," Clark said. "But if industries wait until it's working well and the demand rises, they may have to wait in line to buy a system."

The Tech project will send engineers to 20-25 textile and food processing plants. They will assess interest in solar energy and explain to managers the possible advantages of solar systems.

The researchers will perform complete energy surveys at participating plants and emphasize processes which could be best suited for solar conversions.

Later, Georgia Tech will select six industrial sites for case studies. Engineers will design solar systems for processes in each plant, then report back to management with their findings. In so doing, Clark said, the research team will accumulate information on the factors which would lead industries to implement solar plans.

Tech is not the only research center doing promotional work in solar energy for Southern Solar, the Department of Energy's regional center for solar development. North Carolina State University and Texas A&M have undertaken similar projects.

Federal officials are focusing on industrial development in solar energy because of the major quantities of energy required for manufacturing processes.

"Even though solar is attractive for residential uses, these installations won't have a major impact on the United States' overall energy consumption patterns," Clark said. "If this country is to derive a significant portion of its energy from the sun by the year 2,000, then industries must convert."

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