

# NEWS

## From GEORGIA TECH'S ENGINEERING EXPERIMENT STATION

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TECH HELPING ATLANTA STUDY

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SOLAR WATER HEATER PLANS

For Immediate Release

ATLANTA, GA....Should the City of Atlanta buy residential solar hot water heating systems to sell or lease to its citizens?

Georgia Tech engineers will answer that question in a four-month feasibility study sponsored by the City. The project will be underwritten with a Department of Energy grant.

"Several utilities in other states have programs like this or they're planning them," said Jim Clark, project director at Tech's Engineering Experiment Station. "We have to decide if it's technically and economically advisable for a city which is not in the utility business to do this as a service."

The Tennessee Valley Authority already has installed more than 700 of a projected 1,000 solar hot water heaters in Memphis with another 10,000 installations planned for Nashville. On the West coast, four utilities -- Southern California Edison, San Diego Gas and Electric, Pacific Gas and Electric, and Southern California Gas -- have sought permission from state officials to begin similar programs.

These utilities are financing - or would finance - the solar systems for customers at low interest or no interest. They are interested in developing solar energy because it could lower the demand on utilities to provide power.

If Atlanta followed suit, the city would be the first American municipality to sell or lease solar hot water systems. While Tech makes its study, the city

(more)

will explore the legal ramifications of the proposal, under the direction of Atlanta energy coordinator Angie Jones.

One way for the city to fund such a program would be a sale of low interest municipal bonds, Clark said. A variety of financing plans for homeowners might be devised, including an escalation option through which monthly payments started low but rose as the cost for conventional fuels increased.

Prices for solar water heaters generally range from \$1,000 to \$3,000 retail but homeowners could finance them for monthly payments which would probably run slightly higher than current utility bills. In the long term, the expense of owning a solar system would be less than that of a conventional water heater, Clark said.

Solar hot water systems usually have flat plate collectors which are placed on the roofs of residences or on the ground beside houses. In some systems, water passes through the collector where it is warmed by the sun's rays and then returned to a hot water tank for storage. Other units use an antifreeze solution to collect the solar energy and the heat is then transferred to the domestic water. The systems can include a supplemental gas or electric heating unit.

The potential for using solar energy in Atlanta is roughly equal to that of most American cities, Clark said.

"I am pleased that Georgia Tech will conduct this important study for the City of Atlanta," said Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson. "It is going to take this kind of cooperation between the academic world and the government to find solutions to the serious problems facing the world as we enter the 1980's.

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