

PROFILE

# Thrust into the limelight

**Until recently, Barry Bredenkamp** was simply the acting operations manager for a little-known body called the National Energy Efficiency Agency (NEEA).

But after the recent power blackouts he's suddenly in constant demand and his advice sought on how to deal with the power crunch.

A division of the Central Energy Fund, the NEEA has been thrust into the limelight as new and innovative power sources are sought.

"I've never been this busy in my life," said an exhausted Bredenkamp before going on the first break he has had in three years.

Setting up an interview with him was difficult. After a few weeks of trying to schedule a meeting, he cancelled at the last minute because he had been asked to fly to Cape Town to update a high-ranking official in the department of minerals & energy.

Bredenkamp has found himself with a far larger audience than the small group of technocrats who used to be about the only people concerned about issues like the more efficient use of energy.

But it is not just the blackouts that have kept him busy. For the past 18 months he has been finding donors, lobbying for more staff and leading various projects for the newly formed agency.

Bredenkamp is not an engineer but his 25 years at Eskom, where he held various marketing positions, has provided him with the expertise to deal with the technical challenges of setting up the NEEA.

The energy crisis has led to the agency receiving more resources. "We have a staff complement of five, but if you asked that question two weeks ago, it would have been one; and if you asked it a week ago, it

would have been three," says Bredenkamp.

The agency's lead project is to oversee the conversion of 2 000 of the country's "critical" traffic lights to being powered by a solar grid.

Solar-powered lights are being tested in a pilot project in Cape Town. One of the more significant findings is that the average traffic intersection uses about the same amount of power monthly as the average three-bedroomed house.

Bredenkamp says these kinds of traffic systems will save more than electricity because they will reduce petrol usage by ensuring that there's less congestion when the power is out.

He says he is also working with business to reduce the amount of energy used by computer hardware. Computers use a surprising amount of power, and hardware such as servers can save power by reducing their dependency on air conditioning.

But for all his work, Bredenkamp does not see a quick end to the energy crisis and not many positives resulting from the blackouts.

It might have concentrated the country's mind on conserving energy but, as he puts it, "it can never be a good thing for the economy".

**Larry Claasen**



**Barry Bredenkamp**  
Unexpected fame