

180 bids received for Port Elizabeth solar water heater project

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The Central Energy Fund (CEF) said it received some 180 bids in response to its advertisement seeking interested parties for the supply of solar water heaters (SWHs) for the initial phase of a major project roll-out in Port Elizabeth.

South African National Energy Research Institute CEO **Kevin Nasiep** said that the organisation was assessing the bids and would make a final decision on three or four suppliers in the coming weeks.

The project would entail the large-scale installation of SWHs for domestic use in the Nelson Mandela Bay municipality (NMBM) during a number of phases over the next five years.

About 100 000 SWHs could potentially be installed in the NMBM, and a target of installation of 60 000 units over the next five years has been set, with the potential to save 41 MW of power.

The next important step in the project process would be to evaluate potential system installers.

Both flat plate and evacuated tube collector SWH systems were considered for the tender, while offers should include 150-l, 200-l, 250-l and 300-l storage tanks, said CEF in the initial tender.

It added that back-up electrically operated elements of 2 kW must be included for tanks with a capacity of up to 200 l and 3 kW for tanks with a capacity of up to 300 l.

Suppliers of SWHs had to ensure that their product conformed with the standards as set out by the South African Bureau of Standards and would have to register the equipment under Eskom's demand-side management (DSM) subsidy programme once these standards were complied with.

What differentiated the project was that it was being done with the assistance of the municipality, which would assess a homeowner as to whether or not they were reliable customers. Following initial assessment, the municipality would also be involved in the revenue collection process, and this would no longer be a separate process between suppliers and homeowners.

The project would garner DSM funding under Eskom's DSM programme, and would also look at unlocking funds through the Clean Development Mechanism under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Nasiep emphasised that the cost factor was a challenge as affordability was the goal.

Depending on the uptake from consumers in the project, CEF was aiming at bringing the cost of a system down to about R12 000. Nasiep said the systems generally cost about R17 000.

It was highlighted that legislation mandating the use of solar water heating systems on new-build developments could greatly benefit the industry, and there was said to be a fair chance that this could be promulgated in the future.

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