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RENEWABLE ENERGY

PEAK MITIGATION

Solar water-heating intervention aims to reduce power consumption

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In the midst of South Africa's growing demand for electricity, the State-owned Central Energy Fund (CEF), the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have launched a solar water-heating intervention, aimed at assisting households to reduce energy consumption.

The project, known as SWH500, is funded jointly by the CEF and the UNDP.

SWH 500 will be rolled out over the next six months in Gauteng, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

The project involves government and the UNDP subsidising 500 solar water-heating systems sold in the three provinces, on an equal split of 166 units a province.

The subsidy will vary from R3 000 to R6 000 a unit, depending on the size of the unit and the date of purchase.

As part of the initiative to promote the use of solar heating in South Africa, the CEF and the DST have also commissioned an imported solar water-heater test rig, which is the first of its kind in Africa, at the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS), in Pretoria.

The test rig was imported from the University of Stuttgart, in Germany.

The test rig will enable the evaluation and standardisation of solar water-heating devices that will be sold in South Africa, which will assist in the adaptation of the technology to suit local requirements.

All units that will be sold under the SWH500 project will be tested on the new test rig to maintain the highest standards.

The names of accredited providers of solar water-heating units whose products have been tested on the rig will be published in the media.

Only units bought from them will qualify for the CEF/UNDP subsidy.

At a function held at the SABS to mark the commissioning of the test rig, Minister of Science and Technology **Mosibudi Mangena** and CEF CEO **Mputumi Damane** also launched a national awareness campaign to promote the uptake of solar water-heating devices.

It is hoped that the uptake of solar energy solutions in South Africa will improve electricity demand management and curb greenhouse-gas emissions.

"Many of our people still take the existing sources of energy for granted.

"But, in light of the looming crisis not only in our country but all over the world in relation to the depletion of natural resources and the threat of climate change, urgent steps need to be taken to encourage our people to consider alternative and clean sources of energy," Damane said.

He added that the solar water heating market has considerable potential to strategically advantage electricity savings, increase employment opportunities, improve electricity demand management and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

Up to 50% of a household's energy bill is attributed to the use of geysers to supply warm water.

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