



Tour to showcase solar energy use in buildings

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A close-up photo of solar energy panels (Rick Egan/The Salt Lake Tribune)

A tour of solar-powered homes and commercial buildings in six Utah counties from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday will show off the potential of the centuries-old yet underused renewable energy resource.

Sponsored by the trade group Utah Solar Energy Association and the nonprofit advocacy group Utah Clean Energy, the tours in Salt Lake County, Weber County, Utah County, Park City, St. George and Cedar City will showcase 36 buildings that use photovoltaic, thermal and passive solar systems as well as small windpower projects. A full list of sites, directions, carpooling sites, and information can be found at <http://www.utsolar.org>.

The 11th annual tour kicked off with a news conference Thursday in front of the state Department of Natural Resources building on North Temple in Salt Lake City, where an eight-panel photovoltaic array built this year generates electricity and dumps it into the electric grid.

The system will be on the tour, and is part of the governor's plans to diversify the state's energy portfolio, said Laura Nelson, energy policy adviser to Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr.

But solar energy potential goes far beyond the state's plans. Salt Lake County Mayor Peter Corroon, noting solar's affordability, said it was obvious that harnessing the sun's power was far simpler - and would contribute more to energy independence and security - than developing and transporting hydrocarbon fuels and energy. "Solar power can help bring peace to the world," he said.

The two main solar technologies available are photovoltaic and passive water and air collectors. Photovoltaics convert sunlight into electricity using semiconductor technology. Water and air heating is done by passing water, antifreeze or air through metal tubes inside the collectors and piping the heat into homes and buildings.

Energy costs and sunlight availability are pushing a re-energized solar energy industry, which is geared less to off-the-grid enthusiasts than to people who want to lower their bills by heating water and harvesting power for the electric grid while also reaping tax credits to defray the up-front costs.

Buildings on the tour include the Green Building Center, Black Diamond outdoor gear manufacturer and the KRCL-FM studio, where an 1,800-watt photovoltaic back-up system installed in 2003 kept the station on the air during summertime power losses.

Five homes and a business in Cedar City will showcase solar.

Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson, too, will open his home to the tour to show off solar collectors that heat water and run a water pump.

Solar tour

The 11th annual Utah Solar Tour runs 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. For full details of the tour, with photos and links: <http://www.utsolar.org/tourinfo.htm>

* To learn more about solar energy in Utah, see the Utah State Energy Program:

<http://geology.utah.gov/sep>

* For information on state and federal renewable energy tax incentives: <http://www.dsireusa.org/>

<http://www.energytaxincentives.org>