Solar Power Learning Curve

Imagine, homeowners getting together to turn their houses into green energy power plants. It's happening in Washington DC, where after three years of effort and cooperation with the electric company and the city council, over fifty houses in Mount Pleasant will be realizing this dream. The Mount Pleasant Solar Copy www.mountpleasantsolarcoop.org overcame a steep learning curve since organizing, and has many lessons to teach.

The new mission is to have a solar energy coop in each of the eight wards of the city to promote this.

The Washington Post, February 2008 said that there is a threat of power outages and projections of increasing cost of power. Since 2001 and with recent deregulation of rates, electricity in DC costs 49% more. An average increase of 72% has been seen in the overall metropolitan area Electric power that we buy to run our houses comes largely from coal and other fossil fuels. So as we cut off the tops of mountains in West Virginia and burn gas, we are creating a large carbon footprint and the prices are going up.

The power utilities are moving to deliver more green energy. Maryland and Washington DC have mandated higher percentages of power to come from green sources. With newly coined concepts of "Renewable Portfolio Standard" (RPS)—the amount of renewable energy the utility is required to use in its energy mix, and the "Alternative Compliance Price" (ACP)—the fine that utilities pay if they don't hit their renewable quotas, has come the "Renewable Energy Credit" (REC), like a Green Stamp, a way to keep track of how much green energy has been generated, which can then be traded for value.

In Mount Pleasant, for example, an average solar installation on a roof costs about $27,000. The US government will pay back 30% of the cost of the solar panels, with no cap. The DC government will pay back about $7,000 on this system. The PEPCO power company will support net metering so that the homeowner will get credit for energy sent back to the grid, as well as supporting a Solar Renewable Energy Credit tally that can be sold for about $1,000 per year to an aggregator. This means that a solar photovoltaic system on a roof in Mount Pleasant will pay for itself in about 7 years.

For further information, may contact the Mount Pleasant Solar Coop, www.mtpleasantsolarcoop.org/, or Emil King at the DC Energy Office. In Maryland the governing authority is the Maryland Public Service Commission.