



A Hot Solution to Cool Weather Heating Bills

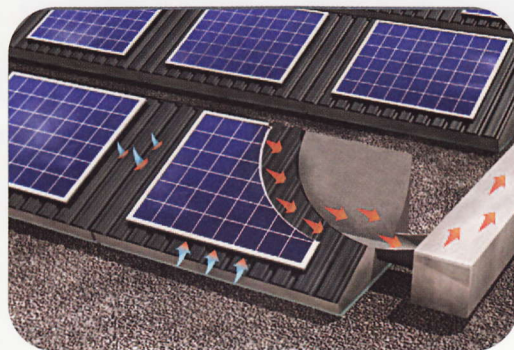
By Susan Spencer

Heating your home with oil eats up a sizable chunk of your household budget, often as much as \$5,000 or \$6,000 a year, depending on building size, weather and current oil prices. And burning all that fossil fuel doesn't do the environment any favors, either.

While generating electricity from photovoltaic solar panels has been gaining popularity as a way to get off the grid – or at least reduce dependency on it – active solar space heating with warm-air collectors can provide even more significant savings for home solar-energy investments. "More and more people will be looking for ways to offset their heating bill," says Steve Balboni, owner of Balboni Energy in Kingston, Massachusetts. "Besides lowering their heating cost, solar warm-air collectors also reduce their carbon footprint."

Solar space-heating technology comes in a few forms, but generally it includes a heat-absorbing flat panel placed on an unobstructed south-facing roof, with flexible ductwork underneath that blows or pumps the solar energy into

the building. If the home doesn't have a clear south-facing roof, the collector panel can be ground-mounted and pumped into the house separately from the heating system.



Solar warm-air collectors are less expensive to install than photovoltaic panels, and allowable installation costs may be eligible for residential renewable energy income tax credits of 15 percent in Massachusetts, up to \$1,000, and 30 percent on federal personal income taxes. Check with your tax adviser to determine your system's qualification.

If you spend five times as much to heat your home as you do on electricity, Balboni says it makes sense to go after something to reduce your heating

bill first. Combining solar warm-air technology with improving your heating equipment efficiency, adding insulation and sealing leaky walls and windows will keep you warmer in winter and keep more money in your bank account.

MAKE A SPLASH.

[BIG CANNONBALLS PREFERRED]

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