

Southern town of Lebanon's Arab Salim looks to go solar

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NABATIEH: The southern town of Arab Salim is looking forward to being fully solar-powered after its residents approved the launch of a pilot project under the supervision of their municipality, in an attempt to save electricity and reduce pollution.

Zeinab Moqalled, who heads a local NGO in Arab Salim, earlier initiated the town's solid waste management project, which has been successful.

"We hope that Arab Salim's solar power system will be a model project, as was its solid waste disposal plan ... I think it will be a successful one because the town is already environmentally equipped," Mokalled said, referring to the town's forest reserves and its solid waste disposal project.

Residents of Arab Salim and local officials met last week to hear a detailed presentation on the solar power project, and unanimously approved the plan, which will cover around 1,000 families in the town.

Mayor Mahmoud Amin Hassan said the municipality will play a central role in the project, dubbed "A Solar Heater in Every House," by contributing a first payment of \$100 for each home to install the new equipment.

"We're interested in the alternative energy project because it will ease the strain of power outages on our residents," he said.

The first phase will cover 100 homes in the town. "We have asked the residents to fill out forms, submit documents, and register their names with us," Hassan said, "and there are more than 70 applicants in only three days."

Work on the project is scheduled to begin next month.

The mayor believes that "a municipality's work should not be limited to filling potholes," and cites several benefits for his community.

He described the constant problems with electricity supply as putting municipal officials "in confrontation" with local residents, who blame them for power problems.

The local company implementing the project has also pledged to contribute another \$100 for each home's payment, like the municipality, meaning the remaining cost for each home should not exceed \$400.

Company president Ahmad Nouredine, an engineer, predicted each home using the equipment will save around \$260 a year on electricity, “meaning that two years’ worth of savings will cover the cost of the solar heater.”

Homeowners will have to raise their water tanks to two meters above ground before installing the equipment, designed to heat 200-liter-tanks of water, and accompanied by a backup electrical heater for rainy days.

Nouredine estimated that users can benefit from solar power for over 10 months, during which “hot water will be available day and night, and in case of cold or rainy weather, electricity can be used to heat water for a limited number of hours.”

The launching of the new project is helped by the fact that solar heaters are not a new phenomenon in the town, but were installed in several homes in recent years, despite the cost of the equipment exceeding \$1,500 per home.

“My three brothers and I installed solar heaters in our houses three years ago,” said Hassan Mahmoud Abdullah, who said the move enhanced both financial and psychological well-being.

“It’s enough to wake up in the morning to find hot water instead of cursing the electricity company or the generator owners,” Abdullah said.