

FEATURE

Do your bit to SAVE the planet

The more renewable energy we use, the cheaper it will become, says **WARREN BUGEJA**

GREEN energy is energy that comes from renewable resources including solar, wind, water and bio-energy. Buying green energy is a good way of helping to fight climate change. Renewable resources clean and don't pollute the atmosphere. Unlike nuclear energy, they are safe and won't run out as will oil, gas and coal. Renewable resources present a vast resource, which remains largely untapped.

The sun is an inexhaustible source of energy. Solar heaters, for example, convert sunlight into heat in order to warm water and room temperature. Wind energy is the fastest growing source of energy in the world and can contribute substantially to the worldwide goals for carbon-dioxide emission reduction. Hydrogen is expected to be one of the most significant energy carriers to store and distribute renewable energy to end-users. And most of the earth's surface is covered by water – there are several forms of harnessing energy from water, such as hydropower, wave energy, tidal energy and osmosis energy.

Locally, the Gaia foundation, set up in 1994 to protect Malta's environment and promote sustainable living, is working on endorsing renewable energy technologies. The foundation has its own waste separating programme and runs an organic farm, indigenous nursery and tree-planting and coastal management projects.

The foundation plans to run its own headquarters, situated at the Elysium Nursery at Ghajn Tuffieha, on renewable energy, thus providing a working model and giving the public a practical and workable option for their own needs. Project Helios takes its name from Greek mythology – Helios is the personification of the sun, which gives light and energy.

"It is very strange how in Malta, people are still very much in the dark about how feasible some renewable energy technologies really are," said Rudolf Ragonesi, director and the driving force behind Gaia.

"They haven't cottoned onto the idea of solar energy for example, unlike other Mediterranean countries such as Israel, Cyprus and Greece, where solar water heating is widespread. Water heating is



one of the main guzzlers and solar water heating greatly reduces heating bills. Young couples should include solar heating in their budget before moving into a new home. In the long term they will surely get their money back."

For those who wish to learn more about solar energy and the benefits of bio-diesel, another form of green energy which Gaia uses extensively, the foundation will next month be launching Gaiafest, a celebration of holistic living at the Elysium centre in Ghajn Tuffieha.

Besides outdoor activities including live dance and music, stalls selling organic food, fair-trade goods, natural products and services, several workshops and talks are planned in the centre's conference hall which seats up to 70 persons. The topics cover diverse themes such as complementary therapies, creativity,

psychotherapy, ecology, philanthropy, nutrition and diet, feng-shui, martial arts, animal welfare, the environment and respect for life.

"The festival," said Dr Ragonesi, "is about becoming aware of how our bodies, the products we buy and use, our collective inner journeying and the environment we live in are interrelated, about living lives which are not disjointed, fostering greater respect for natural well-being, natural resources and all lifeforms."

• Gaiafest will be held between June 3-7. Doors open at 6 p.m. Entrance fee is 75c. Those wishing to take part in this festival or to obtain a comprehensive programme of events may contact the Gaia Foundation by phone on 2158 4473/4, by e-mail: admin@projectgaia.org or online: www.projectgaia.org.

How to save energy... and money

HERE are a few simple tips on adopting energy-efficient measures in your home:

- Restricted flow taps: A simple and inexpensive aerator tap or shower head can reduce water use by more than 60 per cent.
- Skylights: A properly designed skylight reduces the need for artificial light and saves on lighting costs.
- Use compact fluorescent lamps. You can lower your lighting bill by converting to energy-efficient, low-wattage compact fluorescent lighting and fixtures.
- Install shades, awnings or sunscreens on windows facing south and/or west to block summer light. In winter, open shades on sunny days to help warm rooms.
- Turn off lights when you leave the room.
- Caulk windows, doors and anywhere air leaks in or out. Do not caulk around water heater and furnace exhaust pipes.
- Use a plug in the sink.
- Always wash a full load in your washing machine and use the low temperature programme.
- Don't leave your TV, video or cordless phones on standby.
- Fix defective plumbing or dripping taps. A single dripping hot water tap can waste 212 gallons of water a month. That not only increases water bills but also increases the gas or electric bill for heating the water.
- Wash only full loads in a dishwasher and use the shortest cycle that will get your dishes clean.
- Defrost refrigerators and freezers before ice build-up becomes 1/4-inch thick.
- Don't overfill your kettle before you boil it.

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