

30/08/2002

Solartech helps users lighten power bills

Rachael Philip

AS FAR as Stanley Loo is concerned, consuming electricity or burning fossil fuel to get hot water for a shower just does not make sense. Not in sunny Malaysia.

The division manager (business development) for Solartech Sales and Service Sdn Bhd insists on pointing out the obvious - a lot of effort has been put in to produce electricity but existing energy from the sun, which is free, is put to waste.

"Buying a good solar hot water system is an investment which should last for 20 to 30 years," he said.

Today, many homes and commercial units, including hotels and clubhouses, have resorted to using solar energy to heat water thanks to an increasing awareness of environmental issues and the fact that more people realise the long-term savings that can be made on a one-off payment.

One of the company's satisfied clients, Sheraton Langkawi Beach Resort, makes a good case study.

Before the resort decided to install Solartech's Summer solar water heaters, they recorded a hefty electricity bill for their water heaters - between RM30,000 and RM40,000 a month.

"The resort spent RM0.5 million on a solar water heating package and saw the returns within half a year," Loo said. "The chalets are now complete with solar water heaters and filters. Guests are pampered with many things, among them clean drinking water and instant hot water."

Solartech also works with developers on housing projects.

Made-in-Malaysia solar water heaters have been installed in housing projects such as Sunway Damansara and Damansara Mutiara.

"Most young executives want houses that do not require renovation works. They want a house where the security system, heaters and filters have already been installed," Loo said.

He is confident the company will sell more solar water heater systems. "Definitely, developers are more receptive towards installing solar energy systems for new housing projects," he said, when asked if their market share will grow.

With branches in Penang, Kuantan and Malacca, the company has managed to clinch a market share of between 45 and 50 per cent in an industry with 20 players.

But Loo would rather not talk about competitors. "It is not like comparing apples with apples," he said. "We are comfortable selling higher-end products."

He added that the company, which has been in the business for 20 years, is about 10 years ahead in terms of technology.

The company received the Product Excellent Award from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1997.

Currently, Solartech exports about 20 per cent of its products to Asean countries, Europe and West Asia. Loo said the company will reach out to Japan if they locate a suitable distributor.

Buyers have to invest in the solar system, which includes the solar panel and a storage tank, plus the piping system, which transfers the hot water from the roof to bathrooms.

The Summer brand, a well-known name that sits on the rooftops of houses in Damansara Heights, where the company has its headquarters, has an impressive range which stretches from RM3,500 to RM10,000.

Its popular DX model, for instance, comes under the affordable range while its Summer TX is an exclusive, higher-end range. Summer TX is a highly selective absorber titanium vacuum-coating solar collector which can reach very good performance rates.

"All our products come with a 10-year warranty period, but the TX models have a 15-year warranty," he said, adding that no other solar power company gives 15 years warranty.

Loo said the TX model incorporates the latest technology. Raw materials and components are sourced from Japan and the US, while expertise and technology are imported from Germany. The hot water tank is made from YUS 190, one of the best stainless steel on the market which provides excellent resistance to corrosion, he added.

The Summer system is produced and made at the company's eight-year-old Sungai Buloh manufacturing plant. Utilising German technology for its solar panel, the Summer can produce hot water even on a rainy day.

On after-sales service, Loo said very plainly said the company does not see much repeat business. "During the manufacturing process, we use computer-aided machines, especially for welding. In this way manufacturing defects are minimised."

Nevertheless, Loo said the company has a policy of rectifying after-sales complaints within 24 hours.