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GREEN BUILDING: Initiative helps promote the environmental, tax benefits of solar energy

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WNC GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL

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The Million Solar Roofs Initiative was established in 1997 as a national global climate change initiative. This program supports state and local communities in promoting the widespread use of solar electric technologies to generate electricity known as photovoltaics or PVs and solar thermal for heating hot water and/or home heating. The end result is reduced fuel costs and an improved environment.

Energy from the sun shining in North Carolina in one day is sufficient enough to provide all of the energy for the entire state for a full year. North Carolina sends about \$6 billion each year to other states and countries for our electricity. That's a tremendous amount of money the state's citizens could be spending here in our state on housing, heating fuel, health care and education.

Sixty percent of the electricity North Carolina uses is generated from coal, causing greenhouse gases, air pollution and health problems. The movement toward renewable energy, on the other hand, is creating tens of thousands of jobs in the manufacturing and installation of hot water solar collectors, PV panels and other forms of renewable energy. The sun is a clean, non-polluting source of energy that is not subject to price increases and shortages caused by natural or manmade disruptions.

North Carolina has one of the best solar income tax credits in the country (35 percent). In addition, there are federal solar income tax credits (30 percent) available starting in 2006. These tax credits are not deductions. They reduce the amount of income tax due.

Both hot water collectors for water or space heating and PV panels to generate electricity qualify for these tax credits for residences, with even higher tax credits available for businesses and industries. The average installed cost for a hot water solar collector to heat the domestic water runs around \$4,500. Reduce this by about half with the money saved using the solar tax credits and add the balance to a new or existing mortgage and the monthly savings can often exceed additional monthly payments.

According to research at the University of Wisconsin's Solar Energy Laboratory, a typical household electric water heater annually produces about as much carbon dioxide as does the typical family's car. Using solar to replace the electric water heating would provide an environmental benefit equivalent to doubling the fuel mileage of the family car.

Many other countries and U.S. states are forging ahead with solar initiatives that will increase the installation of solar collectors. The Million Solar Roof Initiative in Western North Carolina is helping to educate the general public about solar energy and its benefits. Using solar energy is just one opportunity available right now to be a part of the solution.

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