

Toronto says "yes" to solar power

BY CRAIG SAUNDERS

TORONTO (CUP) — Greenpeace couldn't have asked for a better day Thursday. The morning sun shone brightly, glinting of Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman's colourful tie, as he proclaimed the city's support for solar power.

"People can install these systems in their homes," Lastman said, pointing to a pair of shiny new solar panels displayed in front of city hall.

"I hope everyone starts buying these solar panels. They sound great to me."

Lastman donned a yellow hard-hat emblazoned with the Greenpeace logo as he threw the switch, patching the panels into the power system at city hall.

During their expected 20-year lifespan, the panels will prevent 30 tonnes of coal from being burned,

said Kevin Jardine, a climate activist with Greenpeace.

The city hall panels are the first to go up as part of the group's Solar Pioneers campaign, which started earlier this year. The nonprofit environmental group hopes to promote not only the concept of solar power but also the purchase of solar units.

Toward that end, the group is trying to enlist Toronto school boards in a raffle that will facilitate the purchase of systems like the one at city hall.

And recently, Greenpeace built a smaller, home solar unit in Toronto. It generates enough electricity to power a television and about three lights. Although it sells for \$2,500, Jardine expects the price to drop once demand is high enough for a mass-production facility to be built.

Promoting solar power will once again allow Toronto to claim its on the cutting-edge of

environmental conservation.

"We've been studying new cities in Europe where every rooftop has solar panels," said city councillor Jack Layton, president of the Toronto Atmospheric Fund, which paid for the panels.

"These solar panels are right on top of the mayor's office. This is not happening in any other city."

Ironically, the city's unveiling of the project came just days after city council voted on the very existence of the fund that financed it. A motion was introduced to council to see the money on the \$25-million endowment fund used to offset projects for which the city is currently borrowing money.

But council voted overwhelmingly in favour of preserving the fund that has put Toronto on the map for green-thinking urbanites worldwide.

"I'm very pleased," said Layton. "It was a strong

endorsement of the fund."

Based on similar funds in Oslo and Phoenix, the fund received its funding from the sale of city land in 1992. Last year, it spent about \$1 million on residential, transportation, renewable energy, commercial energy efficiency, school, communications and training and research projects.

And it is being looked at as a model by other cities, including Vancouver.

"We certainly look at the Fund with some envy," said Morris Mennel, a director with Vancouver's air quality department.

Mennel added that although an endowment fund is not a current possibility, Vancouver does have a \$6-million management plan that includes monitoring and regulation of industrial emissions.

Nova Scotia is also considering duplicating the fund, and might start a similar program with proceeds from their oil and gas

rights.

And south of the border, there was some initial interest in duplicating the fund in Chicago. Plans there, however, have been moved to the back-burner, sources say.

Greenpeace hopes to see solar power considered on a national level. Jardine recently met with federal finance officials in Ottawa to discuss possible new alternative energy initiatives for the next budget.

He wanted the Liberal government to introduce a program that would provide 100,000 rooftop solar units — a move that would match U.S. President Bill Clinton's promise of one million. But he described the meeting as "totally unproductive."

"It's clear they have no intention of introducing any new green measures at all," Jardine said.



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actually save us money. You're competing with a very high cost... consulting fees are going up, it's harder to find consultants, you have to put a lot of resources into it to get an implementation up and running that quickly."

"It was the decision we made, and I think it was a good one."

At Dalhousie, Ted Chiasson says students concerned about Banner's implementation can take steps to protect themselves.

"The main thing is just to keep all of your paperwork," he said.

"Keep copies of everything... just in case anything crashes."

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