

## Solar panels installed at Wee Burn Country Club to save money, environment

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05/21/2009

If you walked passed the maintenance shed at Wee Burn Country Club, you might not even notice the new installation on the roof. It doesn't reflect a glare or draw any undue attention.

However, the installation of what is referred to as a solar system is helping to save the country club money on energy costs and is preventing the release of carbon dioxide into the environment.

The system, which was installed about a month ago by Mercury Solar Systems, is the first installation in a country club in Connecticut.

In order for the solar panels to generate energy, the sunshine must hit the solar panels and therefore creates an electric current. That current is a direct current (DC), which is the same type of current used in a car battery or cell phone. An inverter the size of a refrigerator changes the current from DC to alternating current (AC).

"We turned it on some time in April," said Steve Ward, the treasurer of the Wee Burn Country Club. "This month through today, the panels have generated approximately 6,000 kilowatt hours. When you consider that we've had cloudy weather, it's a good deal of electricity. They're operating well, no maintenance. We're happy with them."

Wee Burn was deemed an ideal candidate for the installation by Mercury Solar Systems.

"We look at three things: Do they use enough electricity to warrant a solar system, do they have the correct roof space that the sun hits the space properly to create enough electricity, and is the building owner interested in investing on putting the panels up on the roof? The panels help save electricity and help save the environment," said Jared Haines, the president of Mercury Solar Systems.

The total cost of the installation was \$704,000. The Connecticut Clean Energy Fund paid for 50 percent of the cost. A federal tax credit contributed 30 percent.

In order to be eligible for the federal tax credit, Mercury Solar Systems -- a third party company -- must purchase the panels and sell the energy to the country club at a reduced rate. The company paid for the remaining 20 percent of the project as the country club industry is not eligible for federal tax credits.

"We're able to sell Wee Burn power cheaper than they can buy from utility and it is generating power on site," Haines said.

There are approximately 400 solar panels in total; each provides 200 watts of energy. In total, the panels generate 85 kilowatts of power.

According to Ward, energy is still generated on a cloudy day, just at a fraction of the normal amount of energy.

"From an environmental standpoint, the country club will save 150,000 pounds of CO2 each year, which is the equivalent of planting 8-and-a-half acres of trees each year," Haines said. "In my opinion, that's the bigger benefit [than the financial benefit]. If you can even come close to justifying it financially, this is the right thing to do to reduce your carbon footprint and reduce global warming."

The amount of carbon dioxide offset, or not released into the environment, since the panels were installed is 12,840 pounds, Ward pointed out.

The system took a month to install, a process that was extended by about a week due to the weather.

Companies that have installed these solar systems in the tri-state area vary from self-storage facilities to day spas to schools.

"My sense is the membership is pretty proud of it," Ward said. "They're excited and happy about it. Ever since we turned on the panels, the people involved are walking on air."