

A solar energy milestone for Hawaii

TANTALUS (KHNI) - Hawaii has reached a major milestone in reducing global warming and saving electricity.

All, one hot shower at a time.

50,000 residents have now received rebates for installing solar water systems.

The latest is an Oahu man, who thinks solar is a bright idea.

At the top Tantalus, a Round Top Drive home has a breathtaking view of Honolulu.

But the cost to heat hot water for the house was also sky high.

"I spent a lot of money heating my water," said Tantalus resident, Jim Case.

Jim wanted to put in solar hot water panels, but remembered early systems that didn't work all that well.

"If we had a cloudy day or a rainy day - we had no hot water."

That could be a problem on Tantalus, which gets more than its share of showers and clouds.

But newer technology panels make the most of the sunlight, and now Jim has hot water piped into the bathrooms and kitchen.

This effort to go green has already saved Jim a lot of green - when it comes to his power bill.

"It dropped the bill from 300 a month to 160."

Case anticipates even lower bills during the sunnier summer months.

His daughter Suzanne lives next door, and already made the switch to solar.

"I'm proud of my parents for putting this system in, and proud of Hawaii for having such a high percentage of households putting in solar," said Suzanne.

More than 80,000 homes in Hawaii have solar water heaters. That's roughly one in three homes.

All drastically reducing the amount of fossil fuel for our state, and cutting back on the biggest energy draw for most homes.

"Typically 25-40 % of the energy used in a home goes to heat hot water," said Darren Pai, with the Hawaiian Electric Company.

But now, Jim doesn't have to worry about keeping the water running. Or how long the hot showers are, thanks to solar.

"It has worked and we have never run out of hot water," said Case.

Jim's system initially cost about \$8,000 but with the rebates and tax credits, it cost him about \$4,000. And he expects the system to pay for itself, with lower electric bills, in less than 4 years.