

NZ news | Electrical power

Event aims to help 'electrify' region



Katy Jones | Nelson Mail
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In a week where electricity demand hit a record high, Nelsonians are being urged to switch to rooftop solar and electricity-powered home and transport choices to help boost renewable power supply and save thousands of dollars on power bills.

Photo: Supplied

Households and businesses can save thousands of dollars on soaring energy bills by switching to rooftop solar, potentially boosting the country's desperately-needed electricity supply, solar experts said.

People could find out more about potential savings and other ways to power their homes and vehicles with electricity at a [first-of-a-kind community event in Nelson](#), supported by electrification advocacy organisation, Rewiring Aotearoa.

The charity's CEO Mike Casey said people who switched to rooftop solar currently stood to save more than \$1000 net a year on their electricity bills, wherever they lived.

"We're now at a point where solar finance on a mortgage in New Zealand is about a quarter of the price of grid electricity."

Record demand for electricity this week saw power companies burn coal and diesel for extra electricity generation, as cold and windless weather left the power grid without a required buffer of supply.

Diesel is among the electricity system's most expensive and greenhouse gas emissions-intensive forms of generation.

Recent figures showed power prices up 12% on a year ago, with the sector citing [improvements in the electricity network](#) and inflationary pressures.



Cold temperatures on Monday and Tuesday resulted in a record demand for power across the country.

Photo: Iain McGregor / The Press

Casey said adopting renewable, rooftop solar would soon become easier for more Kiwis, with a range of political parties recently announcing policies designed to remove upfront costs for home solar installations.

Homeowners with mortgages meantime didn't need to wait, with low-interest "green loans" available from banks for upfront costs like panels and batteries; technology that had been subject to "massive increases in efficiencies", he said.

With interest rates at 0% or 1%, savings on power bills often covered the loan repayment.

Households that switched to rooftop solar often electrified other belongings like heat pumps, hot water heat pumps and induction cooktops, said Casey, whose Otago cherry orchard ran off solar energy.

"Because why would you use someone else's energy when you can use your own."



The cost of installing home solar systems has dropped, with politicians committing to make the process easier, say experts seeking to help New Zealand "electrify". (File photo)

Photo: Piers Fuller / Wairarapa Times-Age

Casey said homes, farms and businesses that adopted rooftop solar did "that bit to help out with the need to generate so much more electricity" in Aotearoa. Excess power from grid-tied systems went back into the grid.

The country needed around 25% to 30% more electricity generation to electrify all the vehicles in the country alone, he said.

New Zealand was far behind uptake of residential rooftop solar in Australia, where the practice was subsidised, Casey said.

While there were arguments for and against subsidies, they accelerated adoption, he said.

The more homes that had rooftop solar, the lower the cost of the technology as competition increased, he said.

"The number one reason people in Australia install solar is because their neighbours do."

Electrify Nelson's Adam Burwell said more than half of New Zealand's energy came from imported fossil fuels, for things like industrial heating and transport, leaving the country vulnerable to price and supply shocks from global events like the Iran war.

The most affordable source of energy in the future would be electricity from renewable sources, most likely from people's rooftops, the regional lead for the volunteer organisation said.

"The extraction and distribution of fossil fuels is only going to get more expensive," Burwell, business development manager at local solar company, Current Generation said.

The region's residents could find out more about electrifying their homes, businesses and transport from industry leaders and local businesses at the [first Electrify Nelson Expo next month](#).

Around 30 stalls, live demonstrations, a variety of speakers and food trucks were expected at the free-admission event hosted by local charitable trust, Businesses for Climate Action at the Annesbrook Event Centre on Saturday, August 29.