

CHECKLIST FOR BUYING A SOLAR WATER HEATER

Buy a Solar Water Heater with confidence and enjoy the savings of a high-quality product that's just right for your household. Keep this checklist at hand to guide you through the process.

BEFORE YOU BUY

1. Check your current use and calculate how much you're likely to save:

- Use the worksheet on the next page to help calculate your cost and savings data to help you make sound financial decisions.

2. Contact at least 3 Service Providers:

- They may give you a cost estimate after asking a few basic questions, but should visit your home before providing a final quotation. Ask them to advise you on the financing options they offer, including any rental options.

2.1 What should the quote include?

- Each component of the system to be installed to be listed individually, with all costs associated with the purchase and installation.
- Written confirmation that the system and all of its components are covered by warranties subject to annual maintenance).
- Written maintenance plan clearly indicating service levels e.g. response times, coverage, terms and costs.

2.2 Some questions to ask a service provider:

- How do the structure, angle and position of my roof affect the solar water heater options available to me?
- How do the size of my household and our patterns of behaviour affect the solar water heater options you recommend?
- Can you help me work out the total costs (installation, maintenance, financing, any other costs) and likely electricity savings for the system you recommend over the lifetime of the system?

- What is your maintenance plan and how much does it cost?
- What other things will I need to do to keep my solar water heater working well (e.g. wash off the collector, keep trees trimmed back)?
- What is the warranty on the system and installation and what are the conditions to keep it valid?
- Is there an additional cost to receive copies of certificates of compliance for the plumbing and electrical work on the installation?
- Is a heat pump a good option for my household, and how does it compare to the best solar water heater option for us in terms of cost, savings, quality, warranty and maintenance?

3. Confirm your best way to pay:

- You will save the most if you can pay the full amount from your savings. You could also access an existing bond, which typically adds a year on to your payback period. Other financing and some rental options are available from Accredited Service Providers for high-quality systems costing as little as a few hundred rand per month with low or even zero deposit.

4. Check your insurance:

- Contact your broker and tell them your plans. Ask about any impact a solar water heater will have on your coverage, excess, or premiums. Let them know the timing for your installation so there is no gap in coverage.

5. Schedule your installation date:

- Put the big day in your diary! Congratulations!



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CHECKLIST FOR BUYING A SOLAR WATER HEATER (cont.)

AFTER INSTALLATION

6. Guard against the 'rebound effect':

Once people know their water is heated by the sun and they are saving so much electricity, it is common for them unconsciously to use more electricity on other things or even take longer showers. Help your household avoid this to be sure you get your anticipated savings.

7. Do the recommended maintenance:

It may only be once a year, but don't forget to do it. If you skip it, the life span of your solar water heater may be lessened and it could affect your warranty and insurance coverage.

WORKSHEET FOR YOUR SOLAR WATER HEATER CALCULATIONS:

To check your current use: Look at how much electricity you have been using per month. Check winter as well as summer months and make a note of typical consumption – both in rand and kilowatt-hours (kWh).

My typical summer usage per month: R_____ kWh_____

My typical winter usage per month: R_____ kWh_____

To calculate how much you're likely to save: Add your typical per month winter + summer electricity costs and divide by 8.

(Technically, you are averaging the two and multiplying by 25%). This is a typical monthly savings you can expect.

My summer usage R_____ + my winter usage R_____ ÷ 8 = _____ my expected typical monthly savings.

This also gives you an indication of your payback rate: how quickly your solar water heater will pay for itself. From 4 to 6 years is typical, but will vary for each household and installation. For example, if you expect to save R440 per month, then a R34 000 installation would pay for itself in 59 months (4.9 years). With a typical lifespan of 15 years that means R105 000 saved after the payback. You can also think of it this way: you'd spend R34 000 to save R139 000 (that's over 4 rand saved per 1 rand spent).

It can be complex to figure out your own particular payback rate, accounting for future inflation and tariff increases. However, a range of examples is on the website under the FAQ for "What is the payback period?"

More information on solar water heaters – accurate, up-to-date and unbiased – is available on the City of Cape Town's dedicated www.SavingElectricity.org.za website, including answers to detailed technical questions and more. And don't stop with a solar water heater if you want to save even more money on electricity.

Check the website for many other proven ways to save.



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