

A History of Solar Panels

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Feb. 17, 2009 - [PRLog](#) -- Even primitive man was well aware of the power contained in the warmth of the sun. Solar cookers, water desalination and home heating were among the earliest methods through which human beings harnessed solar energy for their own benefit.

Within the last few hundred years, however, mankind has made incredible advances in both understanding and employing the sun's vast energy. While only a fraction of the radiation that actually leaves the sun reaches Earth's surface, there is still enough to create entire power plants which derive their energy from the sun's rays.

The late 1800s saw the discovery of photovoltaic processes and the creation of some primitive solar cells. In 1921 famous scientist Albert Einstein received the Nobel Prize in physics for his work on the photoelectric effect and by the 1950s the first true solar panels were at work.

At this time the panels were far too costly and inefficient to have any sort of broad based commercial or residential application, but the wave of environmental interest that began in the 1970s put solar panels and solar power on the fast track. Immense investments in research and industry expansion allowed solar energy and solar equipment to become widely available in less than twenty years. They are no longer confined to pocket calculators or small lighting fixtures for exterior use, but are available for DIY installation on homes and in everything from portable panels for hikers and campers, to lamp posts and spot lights for commercial use.

What are solar panels? Any type of equipment used to convert sunlight into energy is considered solar cells or solar panels. The technology behind solar panels has varied widely throughout the past five or six decades and while solar cells were the true origin of modern solar panels, today researchers are shifting to new platforms and approaches to gathering energy from sunlight.

What a modern consumer can expect to find are solar cells crafted from silicon semiconductors configured to trap and convert the sun's energy which are coated in an antireflective coating and contained under a glass cover plate to protect the cell from the elements. All of this is usually mounted in a strong frame which must be mounted at the appropriate position and angle to gather as much solar energy as possible. Domestic applications currently include lighting, garden fixtures, pool and hot water heating systems, home heating and some electrical supply.

The history of solar panels illustrate that the technology is rapidly advancing, and will continue to do so as environmental, energy and consumer demands require.

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