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North County has a hot new green option

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[1]Del Mar is proving to be a perfect place for solar energy company Vaillant Solar Systems to thrive.

A subsidiary of the Vaillant Group, a progressive German-based developer specializing in heating, ventilation, and air-condition technology, Vaillant Solar Systems manufactures solar hot water systems that harness the sun's energy to generate hot water for homes and businesses.

With more than 12,400 employees worldwide and annual sales exceeding \$3.4 billion, Vaillant set up its new U.S. headquarters in Del Mar on March 1; previously, it had been in Carmel Valley for a year.

The award-winning solar hot water system works by employing solar panels filled with a propylene glycol mixture; the sun warms the liquid in the panels, which then travels down to a solar tank approximately six-feet tall by four-feet wide. The heat exchange in the tank transfers heat to the water, which is then transported to the existing hot-water heater and used to provide hot water throughout the home or business.

Vaillant's system, which for residential customers uses two or three panels, can eliminate 3,000-5,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per year, equivalent to removing 10 cars from the road. It has the capability to reduce residential hot water bills up to 80 percent.

It's an appliance, and an approach toward energy conservation and "green" thinking that, for CEO Burkhard von Spreckelsen, is perfectly logical.



"This makes so much sense here," said von Spreckelsen, who, before moving to the U.S., worked for Vaillant in Germany since 2003. "They do it in Germany, where there's no sun. I thought it was time to start here, where the sun is shining year 'round. "The sun is here, we should use it."

"It's the future," he added. "It makes us less dependent and reduces our carbon dioxide emissions. This is going to be the topic for our generation."

Right now, in addition to its residential customers, Vaillant Solar Systems is in talks to implement its energy-saving solar technology with universities, hospitals, and hotels throughout California, Nevada and

Arizona.

The cost of a Vaillant solar hot water system is between \$6,000 and \$8,000, but it's an investment, explained Tara Heiser, director of marketing, that comes with significant incentives, both environmental and financially.

Purchasing a system qualifies customers for a federal government Investment Tax Credit (ITC) of 30 percent, and San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) customers are eligible for a \$1,500 rebate through the Solar Water Heating Pilot Program (SWHPP) at the California Center for Sustainable Energy. Vaillant Solar Systems itself also offers a \$200 rebate.

Despite Germany's climate, von Spreckelsen noted that it is one of the world leaders in its implementation of solar power; given the North County climate and the nation's growing tendency toward "going green," he believes Vaillant to be on the forefront of the movement.

"There is so much potential here to make a difference and contribute to the greening of San Diego County," he said.

Customer feedback has been uniformly positive, said von Spreckelsen and Heiser.

"The interest we've been receiving is amazing," said von Spreckelsen.

"A couple customers switched off their gas valves-that's the most powerful endorsement."

A customer even threw a "Sipping with Solar" wine tasting on March 28 to celebrate her family's new solar hot water system.

Taking full advantage of Vaillant's technology, von Spreckelsen showed pictures of a "zero energy" 8,000 square-foot Rancho Santa Fe home that has installed 35 of his company's solar panels.

Vaillant Solar Systems is located at 512 Via De La Valle (across from the Del Mar Racetrack). For more information, call (858) 259-0305, or visit www.vaillantsolarsystems.com.

Matt Liebowitz writes for the Del Mar Village Voice where this story originally appeared.

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