

saved by the sun



International

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As the Earth heats up at a dangerous rate and fossil fuels become more scarce, ordinary citizens and businesses are bypassing the federal government to lead the way in exploring a clean, renewable source of power: the sun. In an eye-opening report, NOVA shines a light on how and why people across America and the world are “going solar,” using the radiant energy of the sun to power homes, businesses, and even communities.

But can everyday people really make a difference by using solar power? And can solar technologies, with their high cost and logistical challenges, truly play a bigger role in powering the future of humanity? The grand hopes, latest innovations, roiling controversies and practical realities of solar power all come to the fore when NOVA presents *Saved By the Sun*.

In the 1970s, at the height of an earlier energy crisis, solar power looked like the trend of the future. President Carter even installed solar panels on the White House! But in the ensuing decades, as the price of gas and oil dropped, solar power lost favor and failed to make a significant contribution to the nation’s power grid. Now, with rising energy needs and wars in the Middle East pushing energy prices higher, the world has been forced to take another look. Could it be time to take solar energy seriously again? Throughout the US, solar panels are capping more and more roofs. In Germany, a “great wall” of solar panels lines the Autobahn, feeding the Munich power grid. Worldwide, solar energy is expected to be a \$50 billion industry within a decade.

The timing of this solar boom is vital, as the film also explores how fossil fuel sources are contributing to the looming threat of severe climate change. But is the groundswell of hope surrounding solar power warranted? NOVA presents several perspectives, ranging from a middle-class family that found a peace of mind and cost savings by installing solar panels; to a leading energy correspondent who questions the economic sustainability of solar energy; and finally to entrepreneurs who believe the sun is our last, best hope for powering the future.

Other countries are pursuing solar power with far more gusto than the US. *Saved By the Sun* travels to Germany, which despite not being known for sunny weather, has become a solar Mecca. By offering cash incentives, the government has encouraged many citizens, from city dwellers to a pig farmer, to put up solar panels. Germany is now on track to produce 30 percent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2020.

While some remain skeptical, others see a blazing future for new solar technologies. The bottom line seems to be that nobody wants to wake up 30 years from now and wish the answer to that question had been asked earlier. Scientists, economists, politicians, and ordinary citizens explore the untapped potential of solar power to meet our energy needs as NOVA ponders if our planet will be *Saved By the Sun*.

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NOVA

CREDITS

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