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D.I.Y. Solar

Karl Burkart, 08.18.10, 06:00 PM EDT

Plug 'n' play solar for less than \$4,000.

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A new company called Clarian has announced that it will have a plug 'n' play home solar kit ready by next spring. The "Sunfish" is essentially a sun visor that you can hang over a sunny, south-facing window.

The device uses the company's 250 W micro-inverter to feed energy directly into your home through any standard outlet. You plug it into the wall, and in another convenient location you plug in a circuit monitor that uses software to sync the inverter to the monitor, reducing the amount of electricity you pull from the grid.

With a set of five panels (which will cost \$4,000 in spring 2011, but will likely drop to \$3,000 in 2012) you can produce as much as 1800 kilowatt hours per year--about enough to run a major appliance like a refrigerator. It may not sound like a lot, but when you consider that it makes solar generation a reality for under four grand, it could be a game changer in quickly bringing more renewables onto the grid.

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Right now to get in the solar game you need \$30,000 to \$40,000, an expense especially high in tough economic times and one that few households are able or willing to make. But Clarian doesn't believe solar should be an "all or nothing" scenario.

The more homes that have solar, the more stable becomes the grid, and 1800 kWh is nothing to sneeze at. The average home uses about 11,000 kWh per year, so that's a full 16% of a typical home's electricity usage.

Because the price point is so low, there are millions of homes that could afford to go at least partially solar. Imagine if 10 million homes got five Sunfish panels. We would ostensibly cut 18 billion kWh from the total U.S. energy load--roughly the equivalent of five 500 megawatt coal power plants.

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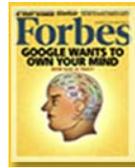
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But the real reason I think this product will be a big success is that it has many perks--for starters, cheaper bills! After the four-year [payback period](#) (assuming some typical government rebates), your home energy bill could be reduced by several hundred bucks per year.

[Power outage?](#) You've got power. And the Sunfish doubles as a sun-shading device which (by some rough estimating with LBL's [Home Energy Saver](#)

assuming five typical south-facing windows) could cut your AC load by up to 20%, making your home more comfortable, while saving the grid another 400 kWhs per home (a typical two-ton AC system uses about 2,100 kWhs per year).

But the biggest savings may come in the form of personal conservation empowered through energy monitoring. Many studies have shown that when people are able to see their energy consumption real time, they get motivated to "beat the meter"--keeping lights turned off and devices powered down as much as possible, and postponing certain appliances cycles until off-peak hours when electricity is cheaper.

All of that means less peak demand for at-the-ready dirty coal power, and the beginning of a smarter, more secure and more efficient grid.

Karl Burkart blogs about technology for the Mother Nature Network.

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For those incapable of reading and comprehending, the cost of \$4k is clearly given for a set of five panels, which seems a reasonable figure. \$20k doesn't come into it. Regarding the amount of sun [Read More]

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so much ignorance...There is a thing called a battery on these solar doohickeys. It actually keeps the energy around during the night, and during cloudy days, from sunny days. It must be magic, like [Read More]

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