



Canada

How climate change has helped greener energy businesses take off in Canada



Rush to beat heat waves and cold snaps during extreme weather drives demand for solar, electric options



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Project manager Kaleb Rodgers inspects a solar panel Monday at Rikur Energy Inc. in Burnaby, B.C. Each system they install costs between \$15,000 to \$30,000, but Rodgers says the Canada Greener Homes Initiative, launched in May 2021, helps offset the hefty price tag. (Ben Nelms/CBC)

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Many Canadian businesses have been hit hard in the last few years by everything from the pandemic to the war in Ukraine and climate change.

But for some, climate change has been a boon, in part because of [government grants](#) meant to increase energy efficiency as Canada aims for [net-zero emissions by 2050](#).

It's all part of a global shift to greener energy options. Solar energy now provides the most renewable energy jobs in the world — 4.3-million jobs by the end of 2021 — according to a [report](#) by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), in collaboration with the United Nations' International Labour Organization (ILO).

- [New \\$250M federal grant program will help offset costs of switching from oil to heat pumps](#)
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There were 700,000 new renewable energy jobs created worldwide in the past year, bringing the total jobs in this sector to nearly 13 million, according to the IRENA report.

And a rush to find greener ways to beat the heat waves and cold snaps that result from extreme weather caused by climate change is driving unprecedented demand for solar and electric options, according to those who sell and install solar panels, heating and cooling systems and fuel efficient upgrades like heat pumps.





The federal government has announced details of a new grant to help low- to median-income Canadian households make the switch from oil to heat pumps, electrical devices that can be used to both heat and cool homes. (Yvette Brend/CBC)

Consumers opt for heat pumps

A heat pump is an electric device that uses many of the same components as a fridge or air conditioner — like a compressor, a condenser, an expansion valve or an evaporator — and can be used to both heat and cool a home.

On Monday, Canada announced details of the [Oil to Heat Pump Affordability \(OHPA\) Grant](#), designed to help low- to median-income households switch from oil to heat pumps.

The grant will offer up to \$5,000 — depending on household income — to cover costs including the purchase and installation of heat pumps and the safe removal of oil tanks.

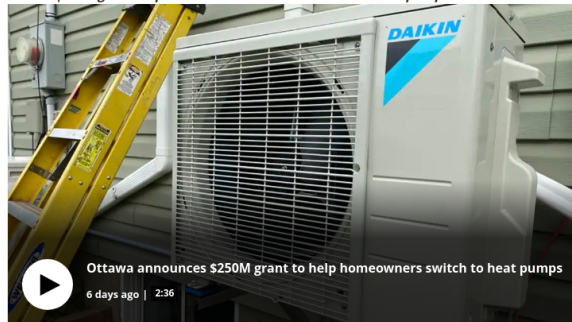
- [Heat pumps in Alberta may be greener, but is the weather too cold for them?](#)
- [Cheaper panels, interest in going green spurs boom in rooftop solar](#)

But even before that announcement, heat pump installers say business was already booming.

Toronto-based [Ricardo Ramberansingh](#) runs [heatpumps.ca](#), [ductless.ca](#) and the Boiler Shoppe.

He says he sells hundreds of heat pumps in Ontario as customers are "ripping out gas furnaces" over concerns about climate change, fuel costs and the environment.

WATCH | New grant helps homeowners switch from oil to heat pumps:



The federal government has announced a new \$250 million grant called the Oil to Heat Pump Affordability Grant that is intended to help low- to median-income Canadian households make the switch from oil to heat pumps.

Business, says Ramberansingh, has been spectacular.

"We actually made a conscious decision to go this way. We were consciously aware of the effects of climate change, and we're doing everything we can."

For competitive reasons, Ramberansingh won't say exactly how many heat pumps he's installed, but he says sales are up 300 per cent in the past few years.

"I think the world has seen the dramatic effects of climate change. It's a reality that we're living with."



Workers install an array of 1,000 solar panels on the roof of Snowcap Enterprises in Burnaby, B.C. (Curt Petrovich/CBC)

Shift to solar

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Shift to solar

Kaleb Rodgers of Rikur Energy Inc. in Burnaby, B.C., says solar sales really soared once the pandemic hit. The company went from installing about 30 systems per year to about 75.

Each system costs between \$15,000 to \$30,000, but Rodgers says the [Canada Greener Homes initiative](#), launched in May 2021, helps people offset the "hefty price tag up front."

Rodgers notes that a lot of people are very proud of their systems and says customers have told him that they feel they're contributing not just to the environment, but to the general population because solar power means they are "pushing clean energy back into our hydro grid."

B.C. Hydro allows customers to use any surplus energy their solar systems produce to offset future energy bills, so that is also an incentive.

To help Canada hit its zero emissions target by 2050, federal and provincial grants — including the Greener Homes and OHPA grants and rebates offered by B.C. Hydro — are in place to help people retrofit their homes.



Brad Gordon, left, owner of Rikur Energy, speaks with Rodgers about their stock for installing solar arrays. Rodgers says many customers feel they are making a difference with solar power as it allows them to put clean energy back into the hydro grid. (Ben Nelms/CBC)






Greener Homes grants drive interest

The Greener Homes initiative from Natural Resources Canada offers grants of up to \$5,000 and interest-free loans of up to \$40,000 for energy-conscious home retrofits.

According to the government, as of September, the program has received more than 196,000 grant applications, with over 38,000 coming the first week the program was launched in 2021. The program has issued [\\$69 million in grants](#) to almost 19,000 homeowners.

As of Nov. 14 the program had issued 3,202 grants for solar panels, 8,572 grants for heat pumps and 11,123 grants for window and door upgrades.

Number of Greener Homes grants issued per retrofit type as of Nov. 14, 2022

Retrofit	Number of grants issued
 Windows and doors	11,123
 Heat pumps	8,572
 Home insulation	7,793
 Air sealing	5,484
 Solar panels	3,202

Source: Natural Resources Canada • CBC News

The program has helped kick start changes, according to Chris Palliser, a spokesperson for The Shift Energy Group in B.C.

He says Canada is about five years behind the U.S. when it comes to adopting solar energy, but says the country is following the same pathway to energy efficiency.

"The United States is kind of our crystal ball, if you will. Now, in California, every new build is required to have solar," said Palliser.

The Shift Energy Group started designing and building solar energy storage systems in Western Canada, but is now expanding to the East Coast.

Palliser says the cost of solar panels has decreased dramatically over the past decade and that it's now cheaper to produce power using solar arrays than it is to pay hydro costs. How much cheaper depends on the province.

He says the falling price of solar panels isn't the only reason business is booming.

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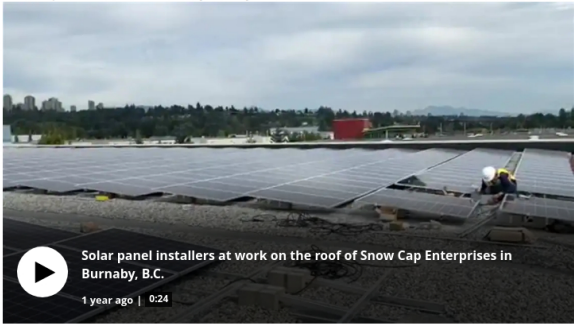
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"Climate change is playing a huge role," Palliser said. "It's the heat domes, the atmospheric rivers that are happening in our face. I think people are taking note and thinking something has to be done."

WATCH | Workers install rooftop solar panels:



When finished, the array is expected to generate half a gigawatt of electricity a year and offset the company's monthly \$19,000 hydro bill by one-third.

He said that high energy costs and changes in weather have coalesced for a variety of groups, including frugal investors, climate activists, energy independence seekers and tech trend setters.

Since 2020, Palliser says The Shift Energy Group's rate of solar system installation has increased sixfold and that they have hired 35 new employees in the last six months.

"Demand is there. Everyone's looking at solar," he said.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Yvette Brend works in Vancouver on all CBC platforms. Her investigative work has spanned floods, fires, cryptocurrency deaths, police shootings and infection control in hospitals. "My husband came home a stranger," an intimate look at PTSD, won CBC's first Jack Webster City Mike Award (2017). Got a tip? Yvette.Brend@cbc.ca

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