

**Efforts underway to tap solar energy**

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**By Sarmad Qazi**

Key initiatives already underway to harness solar energy in Qatar will lay the foundation for the development of appropriate policies and research, GreenGulf Inc. chief executive officer Omran al-Kuwari said yesterday.

Speaking on the last day of the two-day MEED's Building Sustainable Communities in Qatar conference, al-Kuwari who heads the two-year old advisory company based at Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP) further said that although Qatar currently has an energy surplus, it is best to monitor what is working in the region.

"Qatar will have 3Giga Watt surplus over the next few years but its best to monitor what worked in the region and take that forward," al-Kuwari said.

Explaining GreenGulf Inc.'s solar side of business, the official said the company will be opening a 35,000sqm testing site next to QSTP by the end of 2010.

"At least 10 to 12 technologies will be tested using Photovoltaic (PV) and thermal applications. We will be collecting crucial data for Qatar and region as well," al-Kuwari said.

However, for consumers, whether residential or industrial, to take up solar energy solutions, government will need to offer tax cuts and incentives like much of Europe and the US, according to him.

In his presentation, al-Kuwari showed that Gulf countries get at least 1,800 hours of sun; some Middle Eastern countries get even 2,300 hours, whereas Germany in Europe, for instance gets only 600 hours but still explores solar options.

"We have a lot of sun. Solar energy is highly scalable, offers quick installation with easy maintenance and limited requirement of supporting infrastructure. It also churns out predictable production with annual variance of less than 5%," he said.

Lack of regional research though means, the challenges of very high heat, dust and humidity etc have not been validated in the Gulf so far, according to him.

He said there was an ongoing attempt in countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE and Oman to go ahead with research and application in the industry.

"Even in Qatar, the Qatar National Vision 2030, the Qatar National Food Programme, Qatar Sustainability Assessment System, Dohaland's Musheireb, Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC), Energy City Qatar, and QSTP's Solar Testing Facility, are good examples of going in the right direction," al-Kuwari said.

Areas of further interest to Qatar and the region were also concentrated solar power (CSP) and solar cooling.

"We know it (solar cooling) works. There's no doubt about it. We will be testing it at GreenGulf Inc.'s facility as well. It's an area of growth," he added.