

Cold-Climate Solar Domestic Hot Water Systems: Cost/Benefit Analysis and Opportunities for Improvement

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Presented at the 2004 DOE Solar Energy Technologies Program Review Meeting October 25-28, 2004 Denver, Colorado Conference Paper NREL/CP-550-37105 January 2005



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ABSTRACT

To determine potential for reduction in the cost of saved energy (COSE) for cold-climate solar domestic hot water (SDHW) systems, COSE was computed for three types of cold climate water heating systems. For each system, a series of cost-saving measures was considered: 1) balance of systems (BOS): tank, heat exchanger, and piping-valving measures; and 2) four alternative lower-cost collectors. Given all beneficial BOS measures in place, >50% reduction of COSE was achievable only with selective polymer collectors at half today's selective collector cost. In all three system types, today's metal-glass selective collector achieved the same COSE as the hypothesized non-selective polymer collector.

1. Objectives

The main goal for DOE's Solar Heat and Light subprogram is reducing the cost of saved energy (COSE) for SDHW systems by at least 50% [1]. The objective of this work is to determine if this goal is realistic for cold-climate SDHW systems.

2. Technical Approach

Three system types are considered: glycol, drainback, and indirect thermosiphon. For cold climates, glycol and drainback are common, whereas the thermosiphon is relatively novel. COSE is estimated by simulating performance (at TMY2 sites) and estimating costs under a new-construction market scenario. With new construction. the installation is more efficient and marketing costs (at 25% of hardware+installation cost) are smaller, compared to the more-common "retrofit scenario" assumed in [2]. Costs are taken either as the "best-available" costs provided by manufacturers or as estimated from similar products, rather than as costs from detailed analysis of specific designs. Costs include direct materials (collector and balance-of-system (BOS) hardware). installation (labor, materials. overhead/profit), marketing, and O&M. Cost modeling framework and algorithms are detailed in [2]. When a component is varied, installation costs and O&M costs are varied accordingly, as in [3].

We define a series of hypothetical cost-reduction measures for each system type. As in Table 1, BOS variations include unpressurized polymer storage with immersed polymer heat exchangers, integrated polymer piping, and an integrated valve package. A variation specific to glycol systems is to eliminate the storage-side pump with a thermosiphon loop between heat exchanger and solar storage tank. Collector variations and assumed costs are given in Table 2.

 Table 1. Some BOS Components and Assumed Cost

Component	Description	Cost ¹	
Metal Tank +	Conventional tank with	\$460	
heat exchanger	external side-arm hx		
Polymer tank +	Unpressurized polymer tank	\$180	
heat exchanger	with immersed polymer hx		
Integrated	Supply/return piping with	\$25/100 ²	
piping	integral insulation		
Valua paakaga	Factory-assembled unit of all	\$200	
varve package	valves and sensors	\$200	

¹ Direct cost only, does not include install costs or O&M ² \$1/ft for glycol and drainback, \$4/ft for thermosiphon

Table 2. Collectors, Properties, and Assumed Costs

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Collector	$F_r(\tau \alpha)_n^{-1}$	$F_r U_l^1$	Cost
Metal-glass- selective	0.779	4.77	\$500
Metal-glass- non-selective	0.768	7.245	\$450
Polymer- selective ²	0.779	4.77	\$250
Polymer- non-selective	0.739	8.216	\$200
Polymer- unglazed	0.88- 0.029*v	10.24+4.69*v	\$100

¹ Taken from [4], except for unglazed data from [5].

² Taken as identical to the metal-glass selective collector.

3. Results and Accomplishments

The BOS enhancements do not *per se* affect system performance; their impact is on first cost only. Simulations were done for the four unique sets of collector parameters (selective polymer=selective metal-glass), for all three system types, except that the unglazed collector has not been done with the thermosiphon system because of convergence problems. Efficiency of the glycol system with the four collector parameter sets is shown in Fig. 1. The efficiency is ~constant for each collector, decreasing slightly with increasing site temperature. U.S. maps of savings, efficiency, and solar fraction for all systems/collectors can be found in [3], similar to Fig. 2.

Base case and the best two variations are shown in Table 3. With all cost-reducing BOS variations in place, the maximum reduction in COSE is obtained with the hypothetical selective polymer collector. In all three system types, the result with the non-selective polymer collector is about the same as with the base-case metal-glass selective collector.



Fig.1. Efficiency (Savings/Incidence) for the glycol system with the four different sets of collector parameters.



Fig. 2. U.S. Map of Glycol-selective annual savings.

Results for all the variations on the glycol system are shown in Figure 3. BOS variations are done first, followed by collector variations. Once a BOS measure is introduced, it remains for succeeding cases. BOS measures account for most of the COSE reduction. The non-selective metal-glass collector and the unglazed polymer collector are not effective measures because they increase COSE. Even though first costs are lowered, performance is lowered proportionally more. For all cases, only the use of the polymer collectors results in first cost under \$1,500. For all three SDHW types, use of the non-selective polymer collector results in approximately the same COSE as the base-case selective metal-glass collector, but with lower first cost. For similar measures, the thermosiphon system always has the lowest COSE value by $\sim 10\%$, because of elimination of the pump and controller needed in the two active systems.

Table 3. Base and E	Best COSE for	Three System	Types
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System	Gl	ycol	Drainback		Thermosiphon		
	Base	Best2*	Base	Best2 [*]	Base	Best2*	
COSE (¢/kWh)	11.2	5.5/6.3	11.8	5.2/6.3	9.3	4.8/6.6	
% Reduction2*	50.5	5/40.7	53.5/43.8		57.0/46.4		

Note: Best2 and %Reduction2 cells give results for the two *best* cases: polymer-selective/polymer-non-selective. The COSE with today's selective metal collector is about equal to the COSE with the hypothesized polymer non-selective collector.



Fig. 3. First cost and COSE for the glycol system. COSE data are shown with/without O&M cost included.

4. Conclusions

COSE values have been generated for three system types, with BOS variations and five different collector types. The lowest COSE is with all BOS variations in place and use of a hypothetical selective polymer collector. Next-best COSE values were with use of a polymer non-selective or selective metal-glass collector. Polymer collectors made with commodity plastics can cause issues with overheating. Thermosiphon systems have the lowest COSE, but bring issues with pipe freezing and storage location.

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188			
The public reporting burden for this collection of init gathering and maintaining the data needed, and collection of information, including suggestions for should be aware that notwithstanding any other pr currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FOR!	iornation is estimated to average 1 completing and reviewing the colle reducing the burden, to Departm ovision of law, no person shall be	hour per response, in ction of information. S ent of Defense, Exec subject to any penalty ZATION.	ncluding the tir Send commen utive Services y for failing to	me for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, ts regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this and Communications Directorate (0704-0188). Respondents comply with a collection of information if it does not display a		
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) January 2005	2. REPORT TYPE Conference Paper			3. DATES COVERED (From - To)		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Cold-Climate Solar Domestic I Analysis and Opportunities for	Hot Water Systems: Co	ost/Benefit	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER DE-AC36-99-GO10337			
Sharpen Sh		5b. GR4	5b. GRANT NUMBER			
5c.			5c. PRC	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S)5d.J. Burch, T. Hillman, and J. Salasovich		5d. PRO NR	5d. PROJECT NUMBER NREL/CP-550-37105			
5e. TA3 S⊢ 5f. WC			5e. TAS SH	5e. TASK NUMBER SH052003		
			5f. WO	RK UNIT NUMBER		
 PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NA National Renewable Energy L 1617 Cole Blvd. Golden, CO 80401-3393 	ME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) aboratory			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER NREL/CP-550-37105		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) NREL			
			11. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER			
12. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STA National Technical Information U.S. Department of Commerce 5285 Port Royal Road Springfield, VA 22161	TEMENT I Service e					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES						
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15. SUBJECT TERMS PV; cost of saved energy (CO	SE); solar domestic hot	t water (SDHW	/);cold clir	mate; heating systems; metal glass		
selective collector; balance of 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: a REPORT b ABSTRACT of THIS I	selective collector; balance of systems (BOS); 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: a. REPORT b. ABSTRACT Unclassified C. THIS PAGE Ull 18. NUMBER OF PAGES 19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON OF ABSTRACT Ull 19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)			OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON		
Unclassified Unclassified Unclass				19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)		

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8/98)
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