

Solar bloom fades with public, Congress

By Penny Wright
special writer

THE BLUSH is off solar energy. For many people, the excitement of turning the sun's rays into a utility bill cost-cutting device.

Federal solar and energy conservation tax credits are expiring this year with scant public attention. Supporters for extension of the tax credits already are throwing in the towel of defeat.

John A. Clark, University of Michigan professor of mechanical engineering and applied mechanics, agrees: "The general public's enthusiasm for solar is not great right now. The crisis element over energy is much less than four years ago," said Clark who heads the department's solar energy lab.

ACCORDING TO Clark, the present

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U-M engineering professor

consumer attitude toward renewable energy is understandable.

"Solar has just become another source of energy. The ideology — we must all convert to solar energy no matter what — is gone," he said.

In many ways, the attitude change is good and indicates a maturing of the state's solar industry, Clark said.

"However," noted Clark, "the need is

still there, and most people are receptive to buying solar water and space heating systems after a credible presentation is made to them."

Clark calls the 1980s the "marketing decade" for solar and other renewable energy sources. He maintains energy companies having a simplified and credible product, offered at a good price, will be in a position to withstand

even the loss of the federal tax credits.

THE FEDERAL energy tax credit program, dating back to December 1979, was approved by Congress to encourage energy conservation and the development of renewable energy resources, including solar, wind and geothermal energy.

A credit of 40 percent can be claimed from taxes for up to \$10,000 of expenses for eligible energy devices.

The energy tax credit program will expire Dec. 31 unless efforts to pass the Renewable Energy and Conservation Transition Act (H.R. 20001) are successful. The bill would extend the credits for five years and phase out solar credits 8 percent each year with a low-ered ceiling of \$6,000.

Wind, biomass and geothermal energy credits would phase out after three years. Credits for photovoltaic systems would continue for five years at the current 40 percent level.

DESPITE CONSUMER apathy toward energy issues, the fact is that United States energy consumption has been slowly rising, though not yet to

the levels of 1973, the year of the Arab oil embargo.

The U.S. Department of Energy reports that total energy consumed in the U.S. in 1983, the last year for which 12-month data is available, still was 5 percent below the 74.212 quad consumption level of 1973.

Proponents for extending the energy

credits believe the tax credit extension package is necessary to keep renewable energy technologies competitive until all energy subsidies (oil, natural gas and nuclear) are eliminated.

Clark notes, "We are in a tough position as far as energy. The forces are there to cause increases in energy prices in the future."

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Francisco Goya, ink and wash drawing.
"Transport d'un blessé." 1763-64.

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A five-part workshop for job hunters is planned by the Continuum Center of Oakland University 7-10 p.m. Aug. 6-20 at the Holiday Inn of Southfield.

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