

Baking in the sun

Solar cooking among energy alternatives for developing nations

by Christopher Flynn

Staff Writer

Imagine coming home from a hard day's work to find your dinner perfectly prepared.

Thank heavens, right?

Close.

You can thank the sun and some new technology that is actually neither new nor technological.

Solar cooking — that is, cooking with the sun — has been in existence since the earliest tribes, who are thought to have been adept at harnessing the power of the sun to warm their food more than 2,000 years ago.

Solar-cooking advocates and supporters of other renewable energy alternatives such as wind power, hydro power and bio-gas (which converts livestock and agricultural waste into useable methane fuel) convened at the Holiday Inn in Bethesda this week for a forum on energy alternatives in developing countries.

"Two things are happening at once in the world today. The population is exploding and the fuel supply is diminishing," said Darwin O'R. Curtis, a Chevy Chase resident and the East Coast representative for Solar Cookers International of California, a group that markets devices to cook with the sun's heat. He demonstrated his stove on the roof of the Holiday Inn, on a bright, sunny day. Prices range from \$15 to about \$175.

Energy alternatives was just one of the ideas reviewed during the three-day conference sponsored by InterAction — a coalition of 160 U.S. non-profit organizations such as the Red Cross — dedicated to relief, development, education, the environment and other humanitarian efforts.

panel of cardboard, a plastic bag and a black pot, food can be cooked and water can be purified for a fraction of the cost of kindling wood to perform the same functions with fire, he said.

Solar, page A-8

"We shouldn't think this is just for people without fuel," said Louise Meyer of Washington, who has used her solar oven at home to

cook fish, chicken and potatoes and to bake bread and cookies. "It's a lot of fun. You feel like you're getting something for nothing."



Dan Gross/GAZETTE

Darwin O'R. Curtis of Chevy Chase checks the temperature of his solar oven while cooking rice on the roof of the Bethesda Holiday Inn. He demonstrated the energy-saving device this week.

SOLAR

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Continued from page A-1

Throughout the conference, dubbed "Rethinking Development: New Partnerships for a New Century," attendees were encouraged to listen to each other to learn other ways of providing support and relief to developing countries, and were challenged to think of new or better ways to provide such assistance as a group. Workshops and discussions were hosted by men and women who have dedicated their lives to such issues as world hunger, disease and population growth. More than 400 people representing dozens of nations attended the conference, many traveling to Capitol Hill on Tuesday to urge the government to continue its support for world aid.

"Cutting the foreign-aid budget is now under consideration in the Senate," said Dianne Sherman, a spokeswoman for InterAction. "That would literally mean a loss of lives."

The attendees sentiments were echoed in the words of First Lady Hillary Clinton who addressed the group Wednesday during the closing luncheon.

"It is in our national interest to support funding for development abroad," she said, citing the strong market for American products in developing countries. "You cannot have a thriving global economy without investing in people."

Developing nations have already surpassed the United States in making themselves more energy efficient, according to alternative energy advocates.

"The road to solar cooking [in this country] is littered with good intentions and lousy results," said Curtis. "But at least in very dire situations like refugee camps [the concept] is very promising."

Using a unit consisting of nothing more complicated than a coated

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