Sustainable Solar Housing
Marketable Housing for a better Environment
Sustainable Solar Housing

A research and demonstration project of the International Energy Agency

Building ecological housing with extremely low heating and cooling demand and minimal CO₂ emissions is a growing movement. Just as cars requiring only three litres of fuel per hundred km are entering the market, houses consuming annually less than the equivalent of three litres of heating oil per m² of floor area are now being built. Projects range from apartment buildings and row houses to detached housing. However, ambitious goals are not always met and higher costs among other factors hinder market penetration. An essential goal for this Task is therefore to help designers plan economical sustainable housing to increase market penetration and assure that the goals promised customers are met.

The standard approach concentrates on reducing loads. In heating climates this means extremely compact building form, thick insulation, super windows, air tight construction, and mechanical ventilation with heat recovery. Task 28/38 is exploring the combination of energy conservation and solar strategies in the context of marketable sustainable housing. A still unsolved problem is how to economically meet the remaining very small amount of heat demand, ideally also with renewable energy.

Energy use for water heating and appliances becomes important in such housing. Solar water heating is a proven technology. Photovoltaic panels can cover part of the electricity demand but needs a high investment. Systems serving multiple functions may be more economical, i.e. facade integrated solar collectors which also serve as the outer skin of the building. Further, heat losses from the back of the solar collector can reduce the space heating demand. Which mix of strategies makes sense under these new circumstances? How is comfort affected? What features will homebuyers accept? What spin-offs can be applied for retrofitting the existing housing stock? What integrated solutions lend themselves to achieving ecological housing in hot climates?

To address these questions, fourteen countries in Europe, North and South America, Asia, and Australia are collaborating in the four Subtasks described here.

Results

An internet web site offering advice for accelerating market penetration of high-performance housing

Design guidelines for high performance, environmental friendly and affordable housing

Testing reports to manufacturers for key building and technical system components

Documentation of exemplary Sustainable Solar Housing

Open houses and press articles

Above: Row house in Japan
Left: Apartment building in Kassel, Marbachshöhe, Germany (funded by EU/CEPHEUS)
Four Subtasks

A - Market analysis and Communication
In order to adapt sustainable solar housing to a larger market segment, it is important to know how the market will behave and change in the future. Information will be collected on national housing trends, governmental goals, preferences from the building industry, and most important - preferences from homeowners. Results will be used for technical, functional, and architectural solutions.

Communication of results is vital. Vehicles for this include a web site documenting existing projects, design guideline, and constructing next generation demonstration buildings.

B - Design and Analysis
This Subtask provides insights to plan housing with extremely low energy demand and minimal environmental impact that is affordable. The features and components that contribute the most at least cost may change according to building type, market segment, and region. Design guidelines are being developed through cross comparisons of built projects (input from Subtask D) and computer modelling.

Advice will be given for apartment buildings, detached-, and attached houses in climates ranging from temperate to Nordic. The basis for comparison is conventional housing built to local standards in 2001. In parallel, solutions for sustainable housing in warm climates address both comfort and the use of renewable energy.

C - Construction and Demonstration
What measures are necessary to initiate and successfully complete a demonstration project for high performance housing? Pioneers who have built such demonstration projects are sharing experience in planning for next-generation projects. Participants include innovative builders, financial institutions, and planners. At semi-annual meetings advice is offered on how to write a design brief, provide quality control during construction, debug the houses during commissioning and get the maximum public relations impact afterwards. The activity is led by an Australian team bringing fresh new ideas. Their motto is: Prove it by doing it!

D - Measurement and Evaluation
Monitored data from housing projects is being analysed to learn what has proven most effective. Results show the consequences of construction by traditional trades and occupancy by people. A Task reporting format allows information sampled according to national procedures to be reduced to common denominators and then compared. Thereby it is possible to learn what is effective under diverse climatic-, user-, and economic circumstances.

In a complimentary activity, key building components are being tested in renowned national laboratories. Valuable input is being provided to manufacturers to help them optimise their products to these new working conditions.

Leadership

Overall Programme Leadership
Switzerland:
Swiss Federal Office of Energy, Robert Hastings

A - Market Analysis and Communication
The Netherlands and Norway: MoBius consult, Peter Erdtsieck and SINTEF, Anne Gunnarshaug Lien

B - Design and Analysis
Sweden and Switzerland: Lund University, Maria Wall and Robert Hastings

C - Construction and Demonstration
Australia: University of Queensland, Richard Hyde

D - Measurement and Evaluation
Germany: Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems, ISE, Karsten Voss
Task participants

Operating Agent
Swiss Federal Office of Energy, represented by Robert Hastings

Austria
Richard Hyde
Dept. of Architecture, University of Queensland
AUS-4072 Brisbane
r.hyde@mailbox.uq.edu.au

Veronica Soebarto
Dept. of Architecture, Univ. Adelaide

Austria
Gerhard Faninger
iff, Univ. Klagenfurt
Sterneckstraße 15
A-9020 Klagenfurt
gerhard.faninger@uni-klau.ac.at

Wilhelm Hofbauer
Ingenieurbüro Hofbauer, Vienna

Helmut Schöberl
Schöberl + Pöhl DEG, Vienna

Christian Steininger
TB Christian Steininger, Vienna

Sture Larsen
Architektbüro Sture Larsen, Hörbranz

Oiva Hilden
The Finnish Housing Fair

Pekka Aromaa
Rautaruukki Oyj

Germany
Karsten Voss
Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems ISE
Heidenhofstrasse 2
D-79110 Freiburg
karsten.voss@ise.fhg.de

Hans Erhorn, Johann Reiss
Fraunhofer Institut for Building Physics IBP
Stuttgart

Frank Heidt, Udo Gieseler
Bauphysik & Solarenergie
University Siegen

Berthold Kaufmann
Passive House Institute, Darmstadt

Joachim Morhenne
Ingenieurbüro Morhenne, Wuppertal

Carsten Petersdorff
Ecoyls, Köln

Klaus Vajen
Solar Energy research
University Marburg

Belgium
André De Herde
Architecture et Climat,
Univ. Catholique de Louvain
Place du Levant 1
B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve
derhe de@arch.ucl.ac.be

Brazil
Marcia Hammerle-Agostini Ribeiro
Rua Inconfidentes 355/1001
BR-Belo Horizonte, MG CEP-30140-120
marciag@uail.com.br

Canada
Patrick Cusack
Arise Technologies Corp.
321 Shoemaker Street,
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, N2E 3B3
pat.cusack@arisetech.com

Finland
Jyrjä Nieminen
VTT Building and Transport
Building Physics
P.O. Box 1804
FIN-02044 VTT
jyrj@nieminen@vtt.fi

Oiva Hilden
The Finnish Housing Fair

Pekka Aromaa
Rautaruukki Oyj

Germany
Karsten Voss
Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems ISE
Heidenhofstrasse 2
D-79110 Freiburg
karsten.voss@ise.fhg.de

Hans Erhorn, Johann Reiss
Fraunhofer Institut for Building Physics IBP
Stuttgart

Frank Heidt, Udo Gieseler
Bauphysik & Solarenergie
University Siegen

Berthold Kaufmann
Passive House Institute, Darmstadt

Joachim Morhenne
Ingenieurbüro Morhenne, Wuppertal

Carsten Petersdorff
Ecoyls, Köln

Klaus Vajen
Solar Energy research
University Marburg

Italy
Francesca Sartogo
PRAU
Via Archimede 141/a
I-00197 Roma
pra u@mc link.it

Daniela Angiulli
Architect, Meistre-VE

Valerio Calderaro
University La Sapienza of Rome

Japan
Hayashi Montoya
Miyazakukinomorns College
9-1-1, Sakuragakok, Aokbakou
Sendai, Japan
MHNS01234@aol.com

Peter Erdksieck
MoBiuss consult bv.
Diederichsalaan 2
NL-3971 PC Driebergen-Rijsenburg
Peter@mobiusconsult.nl

Netherlands
Anne Gunnarshaug Lien
SINTEF Civil and Environmental Eng.,
Architecture and Building Technology
Alfred Getz vei 3
N-7465 Trondheim
Anne.G.Lien@civil.sintef.no

Norway
Anne Gunnarshaug Lien
SINTEF Civil and Environmental Eng.,
Architecture and Building Technology
Alfred Getz vei 3
N-7465 Trondheim
Anne.G.Lien@civil.sintef.no

Tor Helge Dokka
SINTEF Civil and Environmental Eng.,
Trondheim

Are Radsja
Norwegian State Housing Bank, Trondheim

Harald N. Rastvik
Sunlab and ABB Miljo AS, Stavanger

Switzerland
Robert Hastings
Architekt, Energie & Umwelt GmbH

Eckhard Rennli
SINTEF Civil and Environmental Eng.,
Trondheim

Are Radsja
Norwegian State Housing Bank, Trondheim

Harald N. Rastvik
Sunlab and ABB Miljo AS, Stavanger

Sweden
Maria Wall
Energy and Building Design
Lund University
P.O. Box 118
S-221 00 Lund
Maria.Wall@ebl.lth.se

Johan Smeds, Björn Karlsson
Energy and Building Design
Lund University

Switzerland
Robert Hastings
Architekt, Energie & Umwelt GmbH
Kirchstrasse 1
CH-8304 Wallisellen
robert.hastings@freesurf.ch

Anders Lalive d’Epinay
Basler & Hofmann, Zürich

Andreas Gütermann
AMENA, Winterthur

Tom Andreas
Reinggili AG, Schötz

Daniel Pahud
SUSPI-DCT/LEEE, Canobbio

Karl Viriden
Viriden & Partner Arch, Zürich

Viktor Dorer
EMPA, Dübendorf

Gerhard Zweifel
HTA Luzern

UK / Scotland
Gokay Deveci
Faculty of Design
Robert Gordon University
Garthdee Road, Aberdeen
g.deveci@rgu.ac.uk

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March 31, 2005.