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Ethical Disposal of Solar Panels



Solar power equipment typically has a lifespan of between 20 and 30 years, under optimal operating conditions. While this may seem a long way off, it is important that consumers are made aware of the need to properly dispose of used solar panels.

In 2016, the International Renewable Energy Agency and International Agency Photovoltaic Power Systems predicted that South Africa could accumulate between 750 000 and one million tons of photovoltaic waste by 2050. However, the rapid uptake of solar power by an increasing number of households and businesses could push this number even higher.

Who is responsible?

Under the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Regulations, which came into effect in May 2021, solar panel producers must take responsibility to ensure that much of their products are returned (and recycled by an accredited and licensed facility) after being sold and used.

Manufacturers, importers, and brand owners are held accountable for the entire life cycle of the products they place on the market, from conception to post-consumer waste disposal.

Important role to play

But Patricia Schröder, spokesperson for the producer responsibility organisation (PRO) Circular Energy, says consumers also have an important role to play. She advises that they enquire about recycling programmes offered by producers instead of disposal of the panels themselves.

The glass and aluminium frame of a solar panel makes up more than 80% of its weight and both these materials can easily be recycled. Although silicon only forms a small part of the panel, it is regarded as a hazardous material that cannot be disposed of in landfills. South African regulations stipulate that solar panels can only be recycled at licensed recycling facilities.

Harmful components

“When these panels end up in landfills, it not only means that recyclable materials are going to waste. Some solar panel components can be very harmful, even penetrating the surrounding soil and water,” Patricia concludes.

www.circular-energy.org/ (http://em2.medialist.co.za/ls/click?upn=PiG6xKIUz6CI9ReUrUt4Z-2BNaal34Kd-2FOZTdZU2qaPGwUse-2Bw19cmrBRgYsPHailMvlMJ_1RZYvLt2OGfhvRGxLyobtoqcgw8UnIUuNQbPndvs5bzs5B6qnpMJZKMKr1TcXNTTNaMkBbX-2FsGXNo4gxOrZYhaQz1jd8rsKsa0NZ86y6y2ViZxykk0k4jLGlwyf-2FY0fxgB9sQyLDd3zf7I2VwfkF8wmUhfwwVDnWQ4FE1j71c64RsSjrdaCVPATpLY5KW1LVEe9ID7KOZQtMfvNFO1Se4T-2B47ZWvWpbliPFD8ckfK8-3D)

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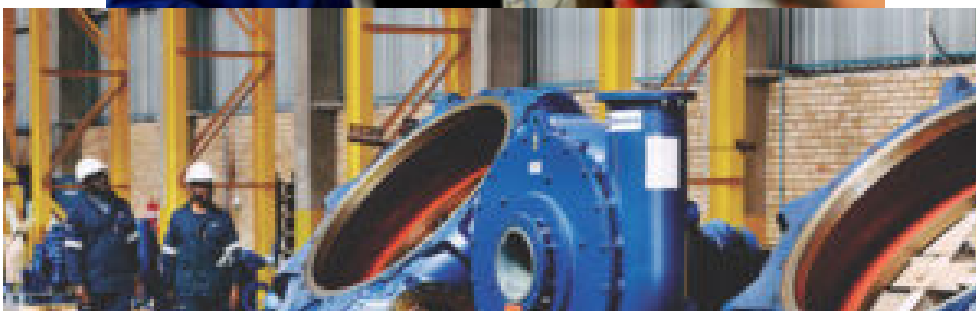
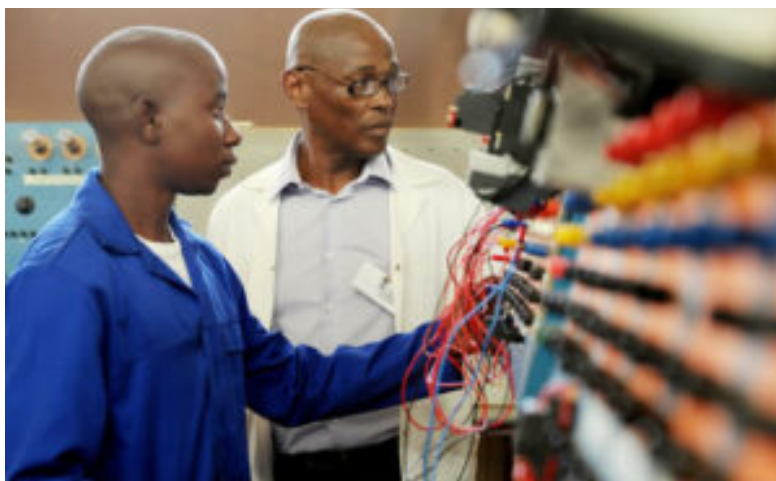
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