

## **Spain makes solar panels mandatory in new buildings**

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SPAIN wants to take advantage of its sunshine by making solar panels compulsory in new and renovated buildings — to save fuel costs and to improve the environment.

Jose Montilla, the Industry Minister, has announced that from next year, anyone who intends to build a home will be obliged to include solar panels in their plans, with the aim of turning Spain from a straggler to a European leader in the use of renewable energy.

With the price of oil rising above \$50 a barrel (£27), solar energy could produce savings of at least €80 (£50) a year on fuel to heat domestic water supplies per household, and reduce greenhouse gases, the Government said.

But critics of the Government's plans say that the installation of solar panels would increase construction costs by between €1,100 and €1,400 per dwelling.

Property prices have doubled since 1999 as part of a housing boom in Spain which shows no signs of cooling.

The new construction regulation will affect more than half a million new houses a year, if the current pace of construction is maintained.

The Socialist Government, led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the Prime Minister, is seeking a tenfold increase in the area of solar panels in use in Spain by the year 2010, from the present total of 581,000 sq metres.

Spain lags far behind Germany, Europe's current solar energy leader, where 5.4 million sq metres of solar panels are currently in use. But in spite of its low domestic usage, Spain is one of the world's biggest manufacturers of solar panels.

According to official estimates, installation of solar panels in 3.5 million dwellings built in the past five years in Spain would have yielded a fuel cost saving of €245 million.

Señor Montilla promised subsidies to encourage further take-up of solar panels and to ease the financial pain of the new measure, but he did not give further details.

A single two-metre solar panel on the roof of a home can cut its water-heating bills by up to 70 per cent a year, according to government estimates. Three years ago Seville, the Andalusian capital, introduced the same measure which the Government now intends to adopt nationwide.