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- Classifieds
- Visitors Guide
- Real Estate
- Financial News
- Health News
- Entertainment
- Services
- Guestbook
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Local News

Brenham Middle School goes solar-- Sun provides power, lesson for students

By **ARTHUR HAHN / Managing Editor**

Thursday, November 17, 2005
 12:19 PM CST

Students at Brenham Middle School, waiting for their rides at the end of classes, thought it was very nice that someone had built something to shield them from the hot sun.

But while the flat, black panel behind the school does provide a shady area, its main purpose is to capture the sun's rays and turn them into electricity.

School district officials and representatives from the city of Brenham and Lower Colorado River Authority dedicated the new solar electric power system Wednesday.

Electricity generated by the system's photovoltaic cells is being used to help power BMS. The system has a peak capacity of one kilowatt, enough to power 10 100-watt light bulbs.

BMS is one of 10 schools in Central Texas to have a solar system installed this year in the Texas Solar for Schools Program.

The program's main purpose is to demonstrate renewable energy.

Schools are mandated to instruct students about natural resources and "part of that is teaching about alternative energy," said Nancy Oertli, fifth grade science/science coordinator at the school.

"For our kids to go out and see a solar panel and how it works is a great opportunity for our students," said Oertli. "They can actually go out there and touch it and feel it."

The solar power system is also being used by science classes at the nearby junior high.

For students now in school, "it (other sources of energy) is probably not going to be optional," she added.

"But at least our kids are going to understand what it means. It's called concept building. They get that pictured in their minds," said Oertli.

The project is funded through a grant from the Texas State Energy Conservation Office and the U.S. Department of Energy. LCRA and the city of Brenham provided additional funds and assistance.



Brenham Middle School science coordinator Nancy Oertli explains the impact using electricity generated by the sun can have on the environment. Banner-Press / Derek Hall

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The system can be monitored online at www.soltrex.com. Visitors can click on "begin your journey now" and find Brenham Middle School to see how much electricity it has produced.

The latest figures showed that since monitoring began, 528 kilowatt hours had been produced, enough to meet the needs of 16 Americans for one day.

It also showed that electricity generated by the panel had offset production of 736 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions, believed to be the main culprit of global warming.

Educational materials provided to teachers are aligned with state educational guidelines; middle school and junior high teachers in August received training in how to use the resources in their classrooms.



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