

SUN SPLASHED



Evan Yee/Staff Photographer

Joe Gamliel installs solar panels on the roof of Valley Car Wash in Van Nuys, making it the first carwash in the Valley to operate with solar power. Owner Sean Shouhed, below, hopes to break even on his \$677,000 investment in 10 years.

Van Nuys carwash's solar panels helping the planet, cash flow

BY JULIA M. SCOTT
Staff Writer

Saving the planet and making money don't often go hand in hand, but at Sean Shouhed's carwash in Van Nuys the two are perfect companions.

Shouhed spent \$677,000 to install solar panels on the roof of his business this summer, making Valley Car Wash the first automotive cleaning outfit to run on energy captured from the sun's rays. With state and federal rebates worth \$273,000, Shouhed, 50, will break even in 10 years, he said.

"I'm living in (the environment), my kids are living in it," Shouhed said. "Financially it is to my benefit as well."

Saving money through renewable energy is a concept that is quickly gaining ground.

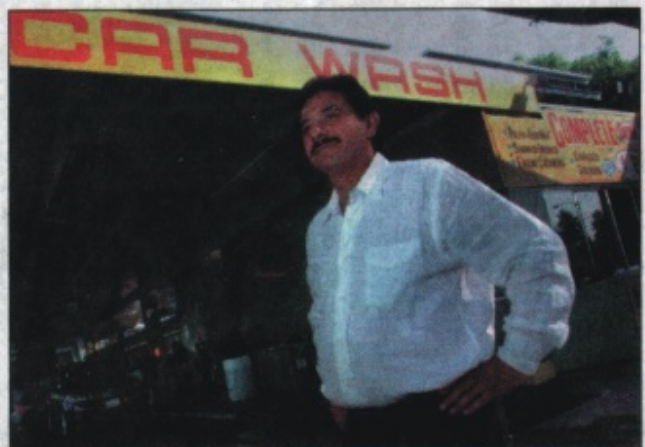
"We're seeing a very strong increase in awareness and interest in solar," said Kim Hughes, a spokeswoman for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, which serves 1.4 million customers in Los Angeles.

That spike is due, in large part, to the rebates available.

A \$150 million DWP rebate program for businesses as well as homes was so popular that officials stopped it in 2003 after receiving more than 600 applications. Since restarting it last month, the DWP has already received 99 requests.

The state put up \$3 billion in incentives over 11 years in hopes of getting one million new solar systems installed on roofs across the state.

Federal tax credits are available, too.



Businesses can get a tax credit worth 30 percent of the cost of the solar installation. Residents are eligible for the same credit, up to \$2,000. The credit expires at the end of next year.

In California, energy providers such as the DWP are upping their reliance on