

Solar's Role in Rebuilding Haiti

Posted by [Margaret Collins](#) in Wednesday, January 20th 2010 under: [International Solar](#) Tags: [Haiti](#)

The catastrophic earthquake that has all but leveled Haitian capital Port-au-Prince, left tens of thousands dead or missing, and crippled the country's infrastructure certainly didn't spare alternative power sources like generators or solar installations. Some solar arrays are still up and running and providing much-needed power, though, while still others are being reassembled out of the wreckage. In [an insightful blog post](#) yesterday, MSNBC.com science editor Alan Boyle took a look at how solar power is providing some immediate relief to the country's energy needs. For instance,

A solar-powered mobile water purification system, donated last year by the Haitian Project, was pulled from the rubble and put into service at a Red Cross aid station. Every day, the Mobile MaxPure rig is turning 30,000 gallons of contaminated city water into drinkable water...

Most of the water purification systems are diesel-run, and fuel of all kinds is in extremely short supply in post-disaster Haiti. By using solar-powered devices such the Mobile MaxPure, more diesel is freed up to power the generators necessary for life-saving equipment.

Solar ovens are a less flashy but no less vital piece of technology now in intense demand. Boyle points out that a \$40 donation is enough to purchase a complete solar cooking kit from Sun Ovens International, whose goal is to eventually provide the ovens for the coming displaced-person camps for victims of the quake.

More solar energy products are pouring in to Haiti, too, like mobile phones and streetlights. The greater use the relief effort makes of solar, the less its dependence on and consumption of scarce fuels and traditional electricity will be (what there is of it). And looking beyond the near future, when the primary concern must be rescue and relief, the country may come to promote greater deployment of solar energy.

One of the major values to using a distributed energy source like solar is its ability to mitigate the damage done when portions of the grid go down. While most grid-tied solar installations in this country won't function when the power goes off—it's a safety precaution for utility workers—it is possible, in high-risk natural disaster areas especially, to "island" your solar installation so that you can still have access to power when the grid is down. For Haiti, where natural disasters have been relentless over the last couple of years, this kind of system (or simply battery-back up solar energy systems) may start looking more appealing than ever.

The relief effort in Haiti needs funds more than anything. If you have been thinking about donating but want to make sure your money is going to be put to good use by organizations with the infrastructure to truly help victims of this disaster, check out [this list](#) on Charity Navigator. It tells you what relief efforts each organization is undertaking, its overall “rating”, and the magnitude of its operations.