

Tour of solar homes includes weeklong showcase of green technology

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The annual Boulder Tour of Solar and Green Built Homes has expanded into an entire Solar Week of activities this year.

The events will be held in Boulder County from Sept. 24 to Oct. 2 and will be sponsored by the Center for ReSource Conservation. Along with the annual home tour, the event will feature educational workshops and other presentations during the week.

The tour of homes has been an ongoing project, but this year marks the first time the center has sponsored an entire week around solar-energy events, said Amy Ellsworth, energy program director for the center.

“This is the first time we’ve ever created a whole week around it, although the home tour has been around for 10 years,” she said. “This was the right time for a lot of reasons. (The Center for ReSource Conservation) has gone through a big transition in the last year with an entirely new staff. We wanted to create a big event with new fun ideas and a buzz around it.”

The center works with municipalities, businesses and residents of Boulder County to help reduce negative environmental impacts by conserving energy, water and materials resources.

“A lot of people are really interested with the passage of Amendment 37, and Xcel is going to be offering rebates for solar. People want to know more about it,” Ellsworth said.

Last November, Colorado became the first state ever to adopt a renewable-energy standard by popular vote. Amendment 37 requires that qualifying Colorado utilities generate 10 percent of their electric supply from renewable energy sources by 2015.

Solar Week features all new homes on the Sunday, Oct. 2 tour, with expanded case studies of the homes and a guided bio-diesel bus tour.

The 10 homes include houses in Boulder, one in Longmont and a couple in the mountains. They will showcase a huge range of different solar features, Ellsworth said.

The home tour is designed to help spread the word that solar energy and green building technology is practical, reliable and affordable. Several workshops will be held during the week, providing hands-on information on the basics and benefits of green building and solar and thermal technologies.

An all-day workshop on solar electricity for homes will be presented by nationally known solar expert Johnny Weiss of Solar Energy International in Carbondale. The workshop will be held Saturday, Sept. 24, at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

The workshop will provide homeowners, contractors and others with information on photovoltaic and other solar-electric technologies.

Four other two-hour evening workshops will be held during the week.

“Introduction to Green Building” will discuss the benefits of green building and introduce sustainable building techniques and approaches.

Another workshop, “Solar Hot Water and Heating Systems Demystified,” will discuss how Colorado’s sunny climate offers the potential to provide up to 80 percent of a home’s hot water and heating needs from the sun. Experts will break down solar-thermal technologies and explain practical applications for homeowners.

Another workshop is titled “Plugging into the Sun: Understanding Solar Electricity.” The passage of Amendment 37 means that 50 megawatts of new solar photovoltaic systems will be installed in about 15,000 Colorado homes over the next 10 years. The workshop will focus on the basic technology, cost and process of installing solar PV technologies and tying them into the electric grid.

A fourth evening workshop will address climate change in Boulder. The city of Boulder is one of more than 160 cities committed to meeting the Kyoto Protocol for reducing greenhouse gases.

The workshop will discuss Boulder’s greenhouse-gas programs and detail easy actions to reduce emission.

Boulder is one of 422 communities nationwide participating in the American Solar Energy Society’s National Tour. In fact, 44 states now offer solar-home tours, attracting more than 26,000 participants.