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**Title** : Renewable energy sector expected to grow in next 12-24 months

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**Date** : 16 July 2008 2156 hrs (SST)

**URL** : <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporebusinessnews/view/360773/1.html>

SINGAPORE : Singapore still has some way to go in its drive towards the use of renewable energy.

But industry players expect to see considerable growth in the sector in the next 12 to 24 months, thanks to initiatives undertaken by both the government and the private sector.

Houses paved with solar panels is still not a common sight in Singapore. But this could change within the next two years.

Edwin Khew, Chairman, Sustainable Energy Association of Singapore, said: "It's a new area that we are embarking upon and I think we cannot be doing everything in one go. So the first step is to anchor Singapore as a major centre for technology, and research and development."

That R&D is expected to help create new technologies that will make renewable energy a viable alternative to current options.

Cost is also a major issue. Observers said moves to bring down the cost of converting to cleaner energy could be the first step towards encouraging energy conservation.

But there is also the need to encourage companies to become more efficient in their use of energy.

Stefan Muller, Managing Director, Conergy Renewable Energy, said: "It is clear that only a mix can be interesting for the future, so solar can be a part of it, but energy conservation is the best way - the cheapest way and the fastest way - to reduce the energy consumption."

Singapore is planning to invest S\$375 million to grow its clean energy industry.

Industry watchers said completely replacing fossil fuel is not a workable option for Singapore currently. However, cutting the use of such fuels by as much as 50 per cent could be a realistic goal. - CNA/ms

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