

Note: RTI placed #3 in Environmental Table on
 News -

#3: Reid Technology — power from the sun

REID TECHNOLOGY'S third placing on the Green 50 list was earned by its solar energy business. The irony, says managing director David Reid, is that environmental considerations are not the main focus for most of the company's customers.

"The [low] environmental impact is a significant benefit but it is not the main driver," he says.

A typical example is a \$7.9 million NZ Aid Programme-funded project the company is working on in Tonga with Meridian Energy.

The 1MW Popua solar power plant will supply the main island of Tongatapu with about 4 per cent of its electricity needs, cutting diesel generator fuel consumption by nearly 0.5 million litres a year.

"They'll be less dependent on imported diesel, which is only going to get more expensive, so they will save money in the longer run. And at the same time they'll be cutting down on diesel exhaust pollution."

The project will begin producing power in August.

For remote locations, where a unit of power costs 70 to 90 cents, a tipping point has been reached, and solar — or photovoltaic — generation is competitive with diesel generators.

Reid Technology, a third-generation family firm, has made a specialty out of installing solar systems offshore, with locations including Great Barrier and Raoul islands.

The uptake of solar power in this part of the world has benefited from northern hemisphere governments' support for the technology, Reid says, particularly in Germany, Spain, Italy and California. That has led to an expansion of manufacturing output.

A further spur has come from an unlikely quarter. "As governments have looked to make cuts because of the global financial crisis — Australia has had solar incentives turned off and on a bit

like a tap — solar manufacturers have been left with excess capacity. So, as they look for new markets, the price of solar modules has fallen rapidly over the past two to three years."

The point isn't far off where it will be viable to make solar generation a feature of any New Zealand home, Reid reckons.

"We have no incentives at all in New Zealand, which makes it hard, but it means when it gets going I think it will work in the longer run."

Small-scale solar also has the benefit of not being a blot on the landscape so it avoids the fights that surround bigger projects.

"I say to my team all the time that if we do our job well it's good on many levels. It's good for clients in that they get power in difficult places that is cheaper in the long run, it's good for us because we get to do interesting work in interesting places, and it's good for the environment."



Northern Hemisphere support for solar power has helped the industry in New Zealand, says Reid Technology's David Reid.

PICTURE / NATALIE SLAT

New River Green 50

Which NZ companies are doing best by helping the environment? To be eligible, companies must earn at least half their revenue from a product, service or technology that benefits the environment. Companies are ranked by a mix of revenue and revenue growth, with equal weight given to each.

Rank	Company	Sector	Environmental benefit
1	ChemRecovery	Metals	Resource recovery, reduce pollution
2	Stonewood Homes	Building	Save energy, renewable resources
3	Reid Technology	Energy	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce pollution
4	Progressive Engineering	Agriculture	Reduce pollution, resource recovery
5	Solar City	Energy	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, renewable resources
6	EROAD	Information technology	Save energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions
7	Earthwise	Household	Reduce pollution, renewable resources
8=	Energy Mad	Lighting	Save energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions
8=	Outgro	Agriculture	Reduce pollution, improve soil
10	Ecostock	Agriculture	Resource recovery, reduce pollution
11=	Wellington Drive Technologies	Motors	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, save energy
11=	CrestClean	Cleaning	Reduce pollution, save resources
11=	Precision Irrigation	Agriculture	Save water, reduce pollution
14	Powersmart Solar	Energy	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce pollution
15	Ecostore	Household	Renewable resources, reduce pollution