

Gas ...

A sure way to manage your energy usage in winter, a season that will see ongoing electricity constraints in South Africa.

Liquefied petroleum gas is a popular alternative energy source increasingly being used by South Africans for cooking and space heating in the home. With gas-powered appliances becoming more cost-effective, and the supply of LP gas reliable, it is expected more and more people will be diversifying the energy mix in their homes by going with gas.

Like other alternative and renewable energy sources, LP gas presents an opportunity to reduce reliance - and lower demand - on the national power grid. Using a mix of energy sources to power appliances - allowing people to cook and keep warm in the absence of electricity - is a worldwide trend that is gaining an ever stronger foothold in South African households.

According to Gary Lindhorst, Merchandise Manager for appliances at Makro, the market for gas-powered appliances and technologies is growing fast. "Sales of gas heaters at Makro have grown steadily in recent seasons and a huge spike is anticipated in sales this winter due to the possibility of power outages and a lower gas price as a result of the recent fuel price decreases. Gas heaters make up more than a third of all heater sales in value; one in five heaters sold in our business is gas."

As a basic guideline, gas heaters use approximately 100 grams of gas per panel in one hour, which means that 1kg of gas could provide roughly 10 hours of heating (when one of the three panels is lit). The amount of gas heaters consume can vary depending on the type of heater and how it is used - being an oil derivative, the cost of gas is linked to the fuel price and can be calculated as approximately 2 litres of petrol being equivalent to 1 kilogram of gas.

"Gas cooking appliances have shown a growth of 30%. They are very useable during power outages, provide instant, constant heat for faster cooking and are cost effective to run," adds Lindhorst.

When it comes to cooking on a gas stove, a 9kg gas bottle will last between three and six months and a 19kg bottle approximately eight months or even a year depending on how frequently the stove is used. The price of LP Gas for domestic use is regulated. The inland cost is approximately R181 for a 9kg bottle and R383 for a 19kg bottle as at 7 January 2015; households can go to the Department of Energy's website (www.energy.gov.org) to check the current price.

Lindhorst mentions that the high installation costs associated with gas cookers is one of the barriers to gas cooking for customers. Households are required to get a Certificate of Conformity from an installer certified through the Liquefied Petroleum Gas Safety Association of South Africa (LPGSASA) - only a registered LPGas Installer is legally qualified to undertake such installations. A comprehensive list of

registered Installers is available via the LPGSASA website (www.lpgas.co.za) or directly at www.sagccgas.co.za.

This requirement is vitally important for consumers as insurance companies may reject a claim in the event of a fire if correct installation procedures were not followed.

The LP Gas industry in South Africa is stable and enjoys an excellent safety record, with the LPGSASA working to ensure sustainable growth of the liquefied petroleum gas industry through compliance with best safety and business practices. Kevin Robertson, the Chief Executive Officer at the LPGSASA, believes there is great potential for gas to replace electricity for heating and cooking in the residential sector.

“Gas for domestic usage is almost 18% lower now than it was in January 2014. But feedback tells us that demand for gas is increasing as the consumer, and commercial entities, look for alternatives to electricity,” says Robertson.

He adds: “Safety of gas appliances has improved tremendously in the past decade and South Africans are assured of a more stable supply of gas. Whilst South Africa has limited production capacity, there is a glut in supply internationally. The Department of Energy has taken steps to make it easier to import gas and investments are being made by major suppliers to help ensure a stable supply by expanding bulk storage facilities.”

According to Robertson, energy efficiency standards for gas technologies are to be implemented, which will enable households to properly compare the outputs of different appliances.

When purchasing a gas appliance, such as a space heater, stove or free standing cooker, consumers are advised to purchase an appliance that has a Permit Verification Number displayed on it. If it does not have a permit it has not been verified for sale in South Africa. Manufacturers are continuously working to improve the efficiency, safety and reliability of appliances – households can check the LPGSSA website (www.lpgas.co.za) for a list of all verified LPGas appliances.

Including gas in the mix of energy sources powering a home is a highly effective measure in the quest for energy efficiency in the residential sector. However, more solutions – both in terms of technology and behaviour change - are available to the homeowner. Investing in an electric induction cooker is, for instance, an energy smart choice. This cooking appliance directs heat to only the area underneath a pot or pan and ensures up to 90% of energy generated is used for cooking, making it 25% more energy efficient than conventional electric stoves.

Over 9 million electric hot plates and stoves are in use in households in South Africa, which cause major strain on the national grid when all are switched on between 5pm to 9pm weekdays, the period of peak demand for electricity. Every household in South Africa can help to reduce the demand for electricity by using alternative fuel sources in addition to energy efficient electric cooking appliances and electricity smart cooking methods.