

Bill Jacobson covered the roof of his auto repair business in Wilmington with solar panels—to the tune of \$250,000.



Fueled by Conscience

First, hybrid autos. Now, hybrid garages?

Bill Jacobson isn't your run-of-the-mill tree-hugger, and his Sports Car Repair garage in Wilmington isn't exactly Greenpeace global headquarters. But with young children and a successful business in bloom, Jacobson is taking steps to make the planet safer for both.

This summer Jacobson had 350 General Electric solar panels installed on his business' roof, covering 108 of a possible 111 square feet of space. His eco-friendly hookup comes from Solar-Dock, a subdivision of Wilmington-based McConnell Energy, and generates 70 kilowatts per hour—usually more than enough to power a garage full of hydraulic lifts and power tools. (Energy read-outs coming).

"The system I have is the equivalent of planting about 260 trees and taking 10 average cars off the road," Jacobson says. "Having a family was kind of the inspiration, and I wanted to do some things to help the environment."

Jacobson isn't ready to trade in his work boots for Birkenstocks just yet, though he's been helping the planet for years. He's been recycling anti-freeze since the late-'80s, properly separating his scrap materials and making use of waste-oil heaters. And though the increasingly popular solar conversion is his biggest leap yet (about \$250,000 worth), the transition has been mostly easy.

"Everything has been very smooth," he says. "I had a bit of a material problem because there's such a large influx of companies doing this right now and it's been hard for GE to keep up with the demand."

The solar panels were relatively easy to install, Jacobson says, and government grants exist for small businesses making the switch. "There are some really good incentives for small businesses to take a look at this right now," he says.

"My customers are very excited about it. A lot are very environmentally friendly. It's been a good way to give back to the planet for a lot of them."

—Matt Amis