



By Don Horne

## BACKUP GENERATION BECOMING THE NORM

Essential services – like hospitals – have depended on standby generation for years.

But in the last few years, standby power generators have become a status symbol, especially in hurricane-ravaged areas of the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Homeowners are investing tens of thousands of dollars in natural gas or propane-run generators that come on-line when the power goes out. The standby generator sector of industry has mushroomed more than five-fold since 2000, with wealthy and middle-class families footing the bill to avoid week-long power outages.

In south Florida, safety inspectors now see up to 100 standby generators a week during their regular inspection rounds.

In Houston, Texas, one in five customers asks for standby generators as part of their building plans. Residents in these hurricane and tornado-prone areas fully expect to lose power for 24 hours or more during the next six months, with a quarter of those surveyed stating that they already owned generators.

Marching in step with this move to guaranteed power is the growing popu-



larity of home solar and wind power systems. Such big box retailers as Canadian Tire and Home Depot have jumped on the bandwagon, developing residential

wind power and solar panel systems for the residential market.

One only has to look at the last utility bill to understand the popularity of weaning oneself off the grid onto your own, relatively-free supply of electricity.

Although spawned from different desires, each represents a similar movement – an investment in self-reliance over that of placing faith in the local utility.

For those investing in solar or wind generation systems (or geothermal for that matter), many are prepared to spend thousands now in anticipation of higher and higher utility bills.

For those spending \$3,000 or more on standby generators, the expenditure can be viewed as more an insurance policy against a predictable disruption in power from the utility, and a desire to maintain the comforts of home during such a disruption.

