

WORK SPACES: SEMMES BUILDERS & CO. IT'S
TYPICALLY QUIETER AT THIS CONTRACTOR'S
CONSTRUCTION SITES ASIDE FROM NAILERS AND
ELECTRIC SAWS

WHAT'S MISSING IS THE LOUD GAS-POWERED
GENERATOR THAT'S BEEN REPLACED WITH A SOLAR-
POWERED MODEL

On the outskirts of San Luis Obispo, a group of workers are busy cutting wood, hammering nails and discussing plans for two homes under construction.

The only thing missing from this scene? Loud noise.

Four months ago, builder Travis Semmes built a portable solar-powered trailer to replace the company's noisy, gasoline generator. "It's made the job site more peaceful," he said. "We work (during the day), so it works perfect for us."

The 4-by-6-foot trailer uses solar panels that generate enough power to run tools and heavy equipment and even cook the workers' lunches. The sun's rays shine onto panels, which charge the battery banks where the energy is stored.

Semmes said his firm plans to build more trailers like this, and he hopes other companies follow. The trailer cost about \$10,000 to build.

"It's economically feasible, makes dollar sense and makes sense for our future," he said. What you see: The small trailer is simple and clean. The only sound is a low hum when more power is being used.

The large, heavy-duty batteries, which combined weigh close to 1,000 pounds, are lined up along the walls of the interior of the trailer.

The trailer continuously generates power on partially clouded days, as well as after the workers leave for the day. "Since it stays light pretty late, it keeps charging even after we leave," Semmes said.

What he sees: Semmes, whose father owns the construction company, says that his dad taught him the importance of sustainable living.

While solar energy was unusual in the past, Semmes believes that it is increasingly becoming a mainstream energy source. "People are starting to wake up," he said. "Now, more than ever, sustainability and renewable energy are more important than they've ever been."

What he likes: Semmes likes working for a business that cares about the environment as much as he does. "I enjoy working for the company because of its commitment to

sustainable living," he said. "We've also always had a great team of guys who work together."

What he would change: Although he enjoys his job, construction can still be hard work. "We can work long days," he said. "Construction can take a toll on your body."

--Written by Dawn Rapp