



## **ESTIF Position Paper: Training of Installers** (Agreed by the ESTIF Board of Directors in March 2004)

### ***Background***

The trust of consumers in the quality of solar thermal systems is a decisive factor for increasing the use of solar thermal (ST) energy in Europe. Trust is achieved by a high level of quality, not only of the hardware but also of the installation work. In some European countries, there have been in the past frequent quality problems, that have damaged the reputation of the ST technology for years. Therefore, ESTIF has a high interest in ensuring good quality standards of hardware and installations.

Assuring a high quality of the hardware has been addressed by the development of EN standards for solar thermal components and systems and more recently through the Solar Keymark. ESTIF is involved in further work in this area.

To ensure that solar thermal systems are installed properly, the installer must be able to master certain specific skills. The time necessary to acquire these skills depends on the general level of training of the installer and on the complexity of the ST system to be installed.

ST-focused training of installers is not only important to ensure a good quality of the installation. In many situations, installers play a decisive role in marketing ST systems, because they have a strong influence on the decisions of their customers. Well-trained installers are more motivated to recommend ST to customers. Installers who have not yet acquired the necessary skills tend to recommend a conventional heating system without solar energy.

ESTIF regrets that training in solar thermal has not yet found its way into the standard training and education of heating installers and roofers. Instead, manufacturers and public or private training bodies offer a multitude of courses, ranging from 1 day to 2 years programs – in varying levels of quality.

In several European countries and regions, there have been efforts aiming at improving the quality of the installation of ST systems. This kind of programs can be a very important tool to support the use of solar energy. Following questions have emerged:

- What could be done at EU level to tackle these issues?
- Could a harmonised curriculum be useful?
- Could a European-wide accreditation of the courses offered to installers be useful?

After extensive consultation within ESTIF and with external experts, ESTIF has taken the following position.

## ***Recommendations***

- ✓ ESTIF welcomes initiatives aimed at improving the qualification of installers
- ✓ As solar thermal is moving into the mainstream, ST training should become an integral part of training/education of installers. ESTIF calls all regional/national bodies in charge of training/education of installers to integrate ST in their curriculum.
- ✓ Until ST is integrated into the standard training of installers, ESTIF encourages ST manufacturers as well as private or public training institutes to develop and offer courses for installers tailored to the specific needs of the local market.
- ✓ Installers are reluctant to spend much time and money on solar thermal training, if the local ST market is not large enough to justify such an investment. Successful courses should carefully consider the costs to be born by the installer and develop their training offers accordingly.
- ✓ The European Commission could speed-up and improve the development of national training courses by supporting the exchange of experiences and training materials among different European countries as well as the diffusion of best practice in teaching and marketing of installer training
- ✓ Due to the very heterogeneous nature of training and education of installers in different EU countries, a EU-wide harmonisation of training programs or a EU-wide accreditation/certification of training courses is not recommended at this stage.
- ✓ Making financial incentives for ST systems dependent on a certified level of qualification of installers has proven to be a double-edged sword. Whilst it can help increase the quality of the performed installations, such a measure can compromise the effect of the financial incentive scheme, if a sufficient availability of certified installers is not given.
- ✓ ST manufacturers and wholesalers should continue their efforts to develop products easy to be installed and clear guidelines for installations.