



Directors: Energy Mad's Tom Mackenzie, left, and Chris Mardon look at an Ecobulb imported by the firm.

Photo: Stacy Squires

Female touch sparks hunt for 'good looking' light bulb

David King

When Chris Mardon and Tom Mckenzie set out to find why low-energy light bulbs had failed to fire the consumer's imagination, they turned to the fairer sex.

The two Christchurch engineers last year set off on a mission to convert New Zealand to low-energy light bulbs, saving consumers millions of dollars and postponing the need for expensive new power-generation projects. But they hit an immediate barrier — women did not like the look of traditional low-energy bulbs.

"I asked my girlfriend what she thought about them and she told me to stick my bulb," Mardon said.

"Tom's wife is Polish and she was even more vociferous. She said she'd move back to Poland rather than have one of the bulbs in the house."

Working with a Chinese manufacturer, the men have come up with what they think is a better-looking bulb. Their

ecobulb is a shorter, squatter version of earlier bulbs, but it puts out the equivalent light of a conventional 100-watt bulb and lasts five times as long. It is guaranteed for a year and meets all New Zealand standards.

The main benefit is it uses about 20 per cent of the energy of a conventional bulb.

They tested 100 bulb designs before settling on one they liked.

"It's good form and good function," Mardon said.

Besides coming up with a good-looking bulb, their Energy Mad business also appeared to have overcome the second-biggest barrier — pricing.

By getting sponsorship from LineTrust South Canterbury and supermarket giant Foodstuffs (South Island), whose Pak 'N Save, New World and Four Square chains have been selling the bulbs at a loss, the company has sold 62,000 bulbs in the Timaru region at \$10 for five.

The pricing made the trial a runaway success and now Energy Mad is in talks with the rest of the South Island's line companies about similar deals.

"We believe we have a good chance of getting the whole of the South Island on board," Mardon said.

Once the South Island is lit up, the ultimate plan is to get five ecobulbs into New Zealand's 800,000 homes.

This would see New Zealand save enough power annually to supply a city the size of Hamilton or Dunedin, Mardon said.

LineTrust South Canterbury chairman Ray Ramsay said the bulb campaign had cost \$100,000, but had been a huge success, with two-thirds of the households in the region taking five bulbs and many consumers coming back for more.

The region had saved electricity and consumers had saved money, Ramsay said. "It's such a huge saving of energy for such a small cost," he said.