

Resources



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Checklist



Be Solar Smart

A Checklist for Residential Consumers Considering Solar Energy

More and more Americans are using the sun to power their homes. It's a smart move for millions of homes and businesses. It's also an important decision. As you explore installing solar panels on your roof, you will find you have many choices to make. Using this checklist puts important information in your hands that you need to know before entering into a contract to install a solar system. It offers questions, considerations and protective measures that can help you get the answers you need to make informed decisions that can affect your bottom line—the safe and effective installation of a system that meets your expectations.

1. Preliminary Questions and Tips

Getting the most from your investment.

- Is your site suitable for solar energy? Is your roof shaded by trees or will trees grow to shade your roof later? Understand the orientation of your roof for maximum solar benefits.
- What is the age of the roof? If it needs replacing soon, this would mean removing and re-installing solar panels.
- Start with an energy audit to improve the efficiency of your home or building.
- Compare solar installer offers.
- Should you lease or buy?

2. Access

Find out your local utility's policies on integrating and connecting solar.

- What utility fees are involved to connect to the electric grid, and to put power back on the grid?
- How long will it take to get approval from your utility company to hook up your solar installation to the grid?
- How much and how often will your utility company credit or pay you for net excess power you put on the grid? (i.e. What happens when the meter "runs backwards?")
- How will the utility measure your contributions to the grid and how will you access this information?
- Who will have access to data on your power usage and generation? Can you control or opt out of sharing it with third parties?

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3. Safety

Ensuring safe installation.

Ask your contractor for documentation showing the following:

- Safety practices and procedures and how they will be followed.
- Licensing, permitting, bonding, and insurance requirements of your local and/or state governments.
- Worker training that adheres to industry standards.
- Industry-recognized credentials in good standing, such as those awarded by the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners.

4. Contracts

Securing a fair deal.

- If part of the contract does not make sense, ask for changes to the contract and/or seek legal assistance.
- Look carefully at all costs and financing terms, including those that may be variable or depend on the utility company or other factors outside of the contractor's control.

The following terms should be clearly defined:

- Ownership terms.
- Potential impacts on selling, modifying or refinancing the property, including liens, filings, etc.

- Termination and removal terms in cases of third-party ownership.
- Designation of responsible party for the proper disposal of the product at the end of its life.
- Performance calculations that specify and include all relevant factors. If installation and/or equipment will be monitored, find out what kind of data is being collected, who has ownership and access to the data, and if the data will be available and/or sold to others.

Contracts should include:

- A reasonable period for rescinding the contract.
- Remediation terms regarding any damage to the property from work.
- Warranties for equipment and workmanship.
- Verifiable minimum performance.
- Remedies if performance projections are not met.
- Start and end dates, if applicable.
- Contact information for duration of installation process.
- Contact information for follow-up, including a contingent contact if the company or product manufacturer ceases operations.
- Long-term maintenance plan and designated responsible party.
- Ask for documentation on who will receive credit for the Renewable Energy Certificates/Credits (RECs) that your system will generate.

For more information and explanations, please visit IREC's Consumer Resources at www.irecusa.org