

SOLAR CITIES

Livermore/Pleasanton/Dublin

Thinking about making the move to solar energy? Start here, with the Solar Cities program.

Solar Cities is a joint project of the cities of Livermore and Pleasanton and Dublin that is focused on educating consumers with the facts about residential solar energy. The program features free educational workshops, web resources, and targeted information to assist homeowners in making decisions about investing in a photovoltaic solar system.

The purpose of the workshops is to educate consumers about solar energy systems, the incentive and rebate programs offered through the California Solar Initiative Program and federal tax credits, and provide them with an opportunity to meet professionals working in the industry. Other Solar Cities resources include website links to a consumer's guide, information about qualified solar installers, solar calculators, and much more.

The Solar Cities program offers solar installers a streamlined permitting and development review process in both cities and networking opportunities with residents interested in exploring photovoltaic systems.

At this time, this program's focus is on residents. If you are a business seeking information related to solar energy, please visit <http://www.pge.com/mybusiness/energysavingsrebates/solar/>

Is Installing a PV System Right for *My* Home?

Now that you have some basic information on photovoltaic systems, the next crucial question is whether installing such a system is beneficial to you. First, consider the orientation of your roof – is there sufficient roof space that faces the south? Are there trees or other natural features shading large portions of the roof? Are there other obstacles such as chimneys or adjacent structures that may obscure the sun?

A device known as the Solar Pathfinder is available for loan to residents from both cities through the Pleasanton Public Library. This equipment allows the homeowner to track the amount of sunlight hitting the home's roof and is relatively easy to use. Solar installation companies can also provide guidance on the suitability of a home for solar panels.

If your home meets the physical and logistical requirements for PV, you are ready to decide if you should have it installed in your home. First, however, you should determine what size system and components will best meet your needs and goals. Use the solar calculator at <http://www.findsolar.com> to gauge the size of the system your home will require. Just click on the Solar Calculator icon on the left of the page.

There are a number of rebates available to the homeowner. Once you select a company to install your PV system, the installers will assist you in obtaining the rebates. To obtain a more in-depth understanding of what these rebates are and how they work, click www.gosolarcalifornia.ca.gov/csi/faqs.html for State incentives and http://www.seia.org/cs/federal_issues/the_investment_tax_credit_itc for a comprehensive document on Federal Tax Incentives.



Steps to Going Solar

Step 1

Select a licensed contractor

To facilitate selecting a licensed contractor, there are some simple questions to answer that will make selection easier. Most importantly, you should ensure that the installer and any sub-contractors are licensed by the state of California. Check a contractor's status at www.cslb.ca.gov. From the Quick Hits section, click on the "Check a license or HIS Registration," insert the six digit license number and click "Search for License."

It is illegal for individuals or companies who do not have state licensing to enter into a construction contract. In California, licensed general contractors, electrical contractors, solar contractors and some specialty contractors can install PV. It is recommended that you obtain quotes from several bidders and inquire about the firm history and experience in installing solar panels. Getting references and following up on them is a good practice. Also, it is critical to ensure that the company's insurances are current and in order. For more information on finding a solar professional, please visit <http://www.findsolar.com/index.php?page=findacontractor>.

Once you have narrowed down the number of installers that you are considering, it is a good idea to meet with them prior to finalizing your decision.

Step 2

Reserve your Rebates

Usually your contractor or installer will walk you through the process of applying for incentives and rebates. Often, your installer will charge you only the net amount, after rebates or incentives. In this case, the rebate dollars go directly to your installer.

Step 3

Secure Financing

Many banks are now offering green financing specifically designed for PV. Many solar integrators, however, have teamed with financial institutions to offer financing or have other financing packages that might be right for you. You should consult with your PV integrator or bank for the best deal.

Step 4

Net Metering Agreement/Zero or net metering with utility company

Net metering affects grid-connected PV systems. Basically, the utility company charges you the difference between what you consume from the grid and the electricity you generate. This allows your electric meter to spin forward when electricity flows from the utility into your home (at night and during stormy weather), and backwards when your renewable energy system produces surplus electricity that is not immediately used by your house (during the middle of the day).

Most existing utility meters will work for net metering. You must establish an inter-connection agreement with your utility company to get a net-metering account. Your installer should handle much of this paperwork for you. This agreement will ask you to demonstrate that your system was installed to certain building codes and electrical standards, prove that your system is insured, and show that your utility has access to a disconnect switch in case they need to shut the system down to service the grid and for the safety of line repair personnel.

Remember, we're all connected together through the power grid. The interconnection agreement assures that our power remains safe and of high quality and reliability. Net Metering allows you to receive credit for the excess power you produce.

We recommend you work with your installer, but provided below are links you can use to apply for Net Metering, or contact your utility company, PG&E, to learn more. More general Information about net metering is available from the U.S. Department of Energy at <http://www.eere.energy.gov/greenpower/markets/netmetering.shtml> .

Step 5

Secure Building Permit(s)

The contractor will typically be responsible for obtaining all permits necessary to install your PV system. These can include a building permit and electrical permit or one permit that covers both. The Solar cities program was designed to streamline permit processes and keep permit costs low in both Livermore and Pleasanton.

The contractor will provide the necessary information about the system and your home in order to secure the permit(s). In most cases, permits are secured over the counter or within 24 hours of application. The permit fee covers the cost to perform plan review and inspections. Plan review approves the plans as being in conformance with all applicable codes and ordinances.

Step 6

Inspections

The City inspector ensures that the installation meets all codes and ordinances and meets the manufacturer's installation instructions and specifications. Upon the system passing the final inspection, the inspector will provide PG&E with the necessary information that will then be reconciled with your Net Metering Agreement and information that was presented by you and your installer.

As part of your Net Metering agreement, your utility company may require an inspection of your renewable energy installation before you turn it on and connect to the grid. Details are provided by your utility company and are usually included in your Net Metering Agreement. Your PV integrator is typically responsible for and will coordinate all inspections.

Step 7

Enjoy

Now you can sit back and enjoy the decision that you have made to do your part to use renewable energy. You might even want to watch your electric meter to see if it really does spin backward!

For more information please visit:

<http://www.solarcitiesnow.com/index.asp>