



10/13/13

© 2013 Solarponics, Inc

HOW TO CHOOSE A SOLAR ENERGY COMPANY IN TODAY'S COMPETITIVE MARKET

Solarponics Energy Systems
4700 El Camino Real Atascadero, CA 93422
(805) 466-5595
www.solarponics.com/research
frank@solarponics.com

Considering eliminating your electric bill by going solar? Congratulations. Much thought and consideration should go into your process of picking a solar contractor for your install. While a solar installation is a simple task for experienced solar industry contractors, most contractors don't have the knowledge or experience, which can be disastrous in the short and long-term. For example, a poorly designed system can cost you tens of thousands in savings and sub-standard equipment warranties may be useless.

Here are some important considerations to ensure your contractor is qualified, using the best materials, saving you the most money while creating a positive experience for all.

- 1. Compare Apples-To-Apples.** Make sure when you receive two proposals for your solar project that you are looking at the solar power system size, and that specs are measured in AC (alternating current) watts. This is the power that your home appliances are running on. Some contractors will try to "inflate" system sizes by talking in DC (direct current) watts, which will be a higher number, but not the proper system design criteria.
- 2. What type of training does the solar contracting firm have?** It is important to remember that you are putting a small power plant on your roof. The installation crew should be qualified to do this work. General day laborers are not qualified. Better yet, your solar company of choice should absolutely employ and perform their own installs. There is no other way to require accountability.

- 3. Look at the level of experience when selecting a solar company.** There have many fly-by-night firms that are trying to make a quick buck on the “green economy.” Select a company that has been around at least before the California Solar Initiative state rebate program was launched (2007) to know that the company you are using has renewable energy experience. Would you hire an inexperienced lawyer to handle a case that could potentially cost you tens of thousands of dollars??
- 4. Know where your solar panels are coming from.** There are top-of-the-line American-made panels available. Consider this choice first. Many foreign-made panels are top-quality also, but cost more energy to ship here. Most important, you want solar panels made by a company with a reputable name, with a proven track record to know that they will be able to honor your warranty.
- 5. Is the solar contractor local?** The Department of Energy, Homeowners Guide TO Going Solar strongly recommends “teaming up with a reliable, experienced, LOCAL installer.” Again, with a local company, you have more direct accountability and can put a face to the company.
- 6. Does the solar contractor outsource their crew?** If yes, there is likely to be disconnect between your project engineering and installation. It is best to have a turnkey operation that delivers your project from concept to completion so the company you are working with is accountable.
- 7. There is no “free installation”.** It is the used car salesman game. The cost of PV systems are mainly based on the quality of product, the local cost of labor and the level of experience and service that a company offers. On \$0 down installs, the cost of Installation is in your monthly lease payment, PPA payment or loan payment.
- 8. What are you paying for?** Make sure your lease discloses the cost of the system that you are financing. Many national companies are being accused of inflating the system costs, leading to a higher federal tax credit for the, greater ROI for the lease company, and reduced savings for you.
- 9. What are the warranty specifics?** Make sure that you are receiving warranties for both the materials (solar modules and inverter) for you project and on the service

itself. For manufacturer warranties, has the manufacturer been in business long enough for you to be confident they'll still be there when it's time to honor those warranties? Know exactly WHO is responsible to honor the warranty.

- 10. Ask for the specifics of the service agreements and performance.** What happens if your system doesn't produce what they say you're going to produce? Who do you contact? A few companies will provide production guarantee, this is crucial for you to see that your investment is paying for itself. Be wary of firms that can "change" your production promise after the system has been installed.
- 11. Review the solar company's portfolio.** A solar energy company should be continuously designing and installing systems. Many electricians offer solar energy systems...on the side.
- 12. Check the contractor's rating with the Better Business Bureau, Angie's List, Yelp and Google.** Reading reviews from current clients can provide insight about the company's quality and service. Also beware. A company can "buy" a BBB A+ rating by solving disputes and complaints. This does not change the fact that they may have had multiple complaints in the first place.
- 13. Ask for references from the company you are looking to work with.** Their clients will give insight into working with the firm and the process of going solar on a personal level.
- 14. No on-site visit?** Although all companies rely on Google Earth to evaluate your roof, Google Earth cannot show small vents, defects or imperfections in the roof, a roof that needs replacement, roof access, landscaping and other issues that are important to know and will ultimately cost you more in change orders once the crew is on-site. BEWARE the change orders that are disguised mark-ups.
- 15. Financing.** Lease vs. Purchase. A much larger issue. Download Solar PV Lease vs. Purchase Option whitepaper.

Solarponics Energy Systems 4700 El Camino Real Atascadero, CA USA 93422 (805) 466-5595

www.solarponics.com frank@solarponics.com Frank Scotti, Experience Director, Solarponics Energy Co., and

Erica Johnson, Ms. Clean-Energy, Director of Community Development, Sullivan Power. © 2013 Solarponics, Inc.