



SOLAR PANELS – UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE BUYING

Householders and businesses are being widely encouraged to buy solar photovoltaic (PV) systems to save on their electricity bills. While many of us will be satisfied with our solar installations, others will end up disappointed and disgruntled, especially when they don't make the savings they're expecting. Why?

- Sales pitches can be very persuasive. They can build unrealistic expectations that saving on electricity bills is as easy as buying a small solar PV system, installing it and flicking a switch. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. What works for some of our homes or businesses won't necessarily work for others.
- Some people won't take the time to look into things carefully before they sign up. They'll take all the sales information at face-value, without really trying to understand the system they're looking to install—what it will and won't deliver, how they may have to change the way they use electricity to deliver the anticipated savings, and the skills and experience of the installer.
- If you're expecting a financial benefit from going solar, you'll need understand and be smart about how and when you use electricity. In most states, solar metering is based on 'net' metering in 30 minute spans—this means that any electricity you don't use in that time is fed back into the electricity grid for credits on your account. If in that 30 minute period, you use more electricity than you're generating, nothing will be fed back. So, if you're at home all day using electricity, you're less likely to be feeding any electricity back than someone who is away all day.
- The energy industry is complex and almost ever-changing—with different federal, state and local government rebates and policies, distribution network requirements, feed-in tariffs and building code requirements.

Before you buy

- Understand the outcome you're likely to get for your financial outlay. Ask about the quality of system you're looking to buy and whether it will be big enough to deliver the savings you're expecting. What quality are the panels? How quickly will they degrade? Are they guaranteed to produce to their rated capacity?
- A one kilowatt solar PV system generates say, four to six kilowatt hours of electricity a day. An average household now uses around 30 kilowatt hours of electricity a day. On this basis, what's the most realistic outcome for you?
- Understand exactly how you'll be given credit for the electricity that you generate and feed back into the electricity grid.
- Ask whether there'll be additional costs, e.g. for special metering to accommodate solar and feed-in tariffs.

- Ask about how and where the panels will be installed—to generate the most electricity they need to be placed to catch the most available sunlight. Remember too, that seasonal differences—for example less sunlight in winter—will have an effect.
- Is the/electrician experienced in setting these systems up, so that wiring is correct to deliver your benefits?
- Will the company provide after sales support and assistance from start to finish, including organising inspections and metering and associated paperwork?
- Will the company still be around to deliver your '25 year warranty'?
- Will you be able to keep the panels clean? Even a layer of dust can affect how well they will perform.
- If you can, check the information you're given with your own electricity retailer.

After your solar PV system is installed

Installing solar panels doesn't mean you can just use more electricity without extra cost. Keep your electricity use to a minimum when the solar panels are generating at their maximum (in the middle of the day) to get the most credits you can for the electricity you're producing.