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Going Solar-Two Years Later

By Andy Scheck



The biggest of our three solar panel arrays holds 16 of the 32 panels. Photo Andy Scheck

placement and performance of our system. We decided to take out one tree in front of the house. We planned to do that sooner or later anyway. That opened up a better roof position, which allowed us to get higher performance while installing a smaller system.

Take the time to talk about different installation options with a solar system provider. Solar systems are designed for 30 years of use and a slightly better performance will add up over the years.

Solar panels produce DC power which has to be converted to AC before being uploaded to the grid. That is done with an inverter; ours is located inside the garage because we didn't like the look of the box outside. Inverters last approximately 12 years and the replacement cost is about \$3000. The solar panel mounts and frames are black to match our black roof.

The predictions for our generated power and energy savings were as promised. In 2010 and 2011 we offset our power usage by 44% and we saved about 65% on our power bill. That means that our investment will be paid for by our energy savings in less than six years. In moments of high production our meter runs backwards, but PG&E doesn't buy power back.

In the last two years the system needed no extra care or maintenance. We are very happy with our decision to install solar panels and would recommend them both for financial and green reasons.

The time of big bucks government tax rebates or credits from solar panel installation is over, so is it still worth helping the state meet its renewable energy goals? California's goal is to increase its procurement from eligible renewable energy resources to 33% of total by 2020.

Our 6.5Kw home solar system, purchased in 2009, gave us 44% in rebates and incentives. An installer told us today's system price is 7% less, but the rebates are only 33%. The same system we bought in 2009 would cost \$2,700 more today.

Let's look at what made us invest in solar power originally. Our motivation was a mix of saving money, helping the environment, adding to our house value and being one of a growing group of renewable energy producers. Like many we try to save energy whenever we can but with a pool, air conditioning and a home office we use power all day long.

In 2008 we attended a presentation by a solar company at St. Mary's College. Shortly afterwards we contacted the company to take measurements and give us a quote.

Roof position and shade had a big influence on the placement and performance of our system. We decided to take out one tree in front of the house. We planned to do that sooner or later anyway. That opened up a better roof position, which allowed us to get higher performance while installing a smaller system.

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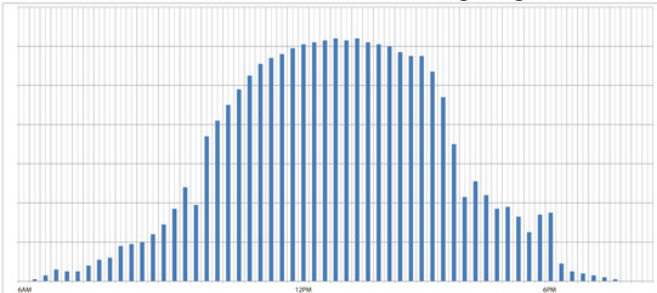
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The indoor inverter is mounted on a garage wall



This chart represents a typical energy production day in the summer. Most solar companies offer a monitoring system that tracks the daily, monthly and yearly production of a solar system.

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