



Go Solar Santa Cruz

5 Easy Steps to Residential Solar!



This worksheet is designed to streamline your solar decision-making experience. You will answer questions that will help you determine whether solar makes sense for you. Once you have completed the checklist, you will be prepared with the information necessary to proceed with your solar project. Grab your PG&E bill and fill in the green boxes below!

Step 1: Understand your energy usage

The best way to understand energy usage is to review 1 year of PG&E bills online:

- ☀ Enter your PG&E account number from your bill:
- ☀ Register and log in to your PG&E account at pge.com
- ☀ Go to “My Usage” tab located at the top of the page
- ☀ Select “Usage” under the “My Energy Use” graph

→ **Save your Usage Graph** for Step 4 if you want to estimate the size and cost of a solar system before requesting contractor bids.

→ Contractors will use your **account** and **meter numbers** and the **answers to this worksheet** to prepare bids.

One kilowatt hour (kWh) equals the use of 1,000 watts of energy for one hour. kWh is the unit used for electricity billing. For example, a 100-watt bulb operated for 1000 hours consumes 100 kWh (100 watts x 1000 hours = 100 kWh). An average 1,200 square foot home uses about 500- 700 kWh in one month.

Step 2: Is your home solar friendly?

Basic criteria used to determine if your home is appropriate for solar installation:

- ☀ Do you own your home? Enter your address:
If you do not own your home, review options with your property management.
- ☀ Enter your PG&E meter number from bill:
- ☀ Does your roof have exposure to the sun?
- ☀ What is the age of your roof in years?
- ☀ What is the open, available area of your roof in square feet?
- ☀ What is the condition of the roof?
- ☀ Does your roof leak?
- ☀ What is the slope of your roof?
- ☀ Have you installed any energy efficient devices or appliances?
- ☀ Do you have any major lifestyle changes in the near future like the purchase of an electric car or hot tub? Are any children moving away from home?

You may want to consider installing free or rebated energy efficiency devices before going solar. Check the [City of Santa Cruz Water Department](#) and [PG&E Energy Savings Assistance Program](#). Installing these devices will reduce your energy use and potentially the size of your solar system.

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Step 3: Reducing costs & Financing your solar project

There are multiple rebates and financing options for your solar project:

- ☀️ **Rebates, Incentives & Tax Credits**
 - Every project is eligible for the Federal Investment Tax Credit through 2016, with 30% of total system cost credited on your income tax return.
 - New home construction is eligible for rebates through the [California New Solar Homes Partnership](#) through 2017.
- ☀️ **Direct Purchase** is often the most cost effective option because you do not pay interest or fees like other payment options. An average residential solar system cost is about \$15,000-\$20,000 before rebates.
 - Do you have the savings or investments to purchase a system outright?
- ☀️ **Loans** from local and national banks have attractive rates and terms for home improvements including solar systems. Some have Solar or Green loans with competitive terms.
 - Do you have equity in your home?
 - Is your credit score 640 or above?
- ☀️ **Purchase Power Agreement or Leasing** are financial arrangements in which a third-party developer owns, operates, and maintains the solar system, and a host customer agrees to host the system from the solar services provider for a predetermined period.
 - If direct purchase or loans are not feasible, consider leasing as a cost effective alternative.
- ☀️ **Group Purchasing** occurs through collaboration with fellow solar buyers within your neighborhood.
 - The price of solar installation drops significantly the more buyers that are added to the package.
 - Are you interested in organizing your neighbors to invest in solar?

See the City's [Go Solar](#) brochure for a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of each financing option.

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Step 4: Get solar bids from solar installation contractors

If you would like to estimate your solar system size and financing options before contacting solar installation contractors, use the [PG&E Clean Power Estimator](#) and enter the required information.

Two things to note:

- Your PG&E bill includes both gas and electric. Only enter the electricity portion into the Solar Analysis tool.
- The percentage of electrical usage that solar will cover can be adjusted to allow you to view how coverage impacts size and cost of the system.

- ☀ Review the summary results and use the “Advance” tab on the left side of the page to compare different sizing and financing options.
- ☀ When you’ve reviewed your options and decided to proceed with getting contractor bids for installing a solar system:

→ **Print** or **save** completed worksheet as PDF.

→ **Contact at least three solar installation contractors** from the list of local companies found at the [Green Building Program website](#) and provide them the completed **Worksheet** to prepare bids.

- ☀ Ask yourself the following questions when comparing your bids and selecting a contractor:
 - What are their **certifications and qualifications**?
 - Do they possess **licenses and insurance**? Are they **bonded**?
 - Have they provided several **good, recent references**?
 - How do they rank at the **Better Business Bureau**?
 - Do they **subcontract** out any work? How long have they worked with subs?
 - Will the contractor support the **warranty** on the solar system?
 - What kinds of **financing options** do they provide and accept?

Step 5: What to expect

- ☀ The average residential installation will take about 2 to 5 days.
- ☀ The contractor is responsible for obtaining permits. The City provides a streamlined permitting process at low cost compared to other jurisdictions.
- ☀ There is little to no maintenance. Many solar installers can contract for solar panel cleaning services which are recommended on an annual basis.

GOOD LUCK!

Do you have any questions about solar installation in the City of Santa Cruz? Contact our Green Building Program Environmental Specialist at (831) 420 - 5124!