

Choosing the Right Installer

A checklist for homeowners and small businesses

Description

Selecting the right installer of a renewable generation system should rank up there with determining if a renewable generation system is right for you and which system best meets your needs. Included below are things that your Cooperative has found to be helpful in determining the right installer for your system.

Installer Licensing/Certification

- Contractors in the state of Virginia are required to be state-licensed to do electrical work. To determine if a contractor holds a valid and current license, go to: <http://www.dpor.virginia.gov/LicenseLookup/>
- The Commonwealth of Virginia does not require contractors who install solar photovoltaic (PV) systems to become NABCEP (North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners) certified. However, a NABCEP certification is one way for installers to distinguish themselves from their competition. To determine if a particular installer is NABCEP certified, go to <http://www.nabcep.org>.

Selection Process

- Compile a list of potential candidates to install your renewable generation system.
- Visit Central Virginia Electric Cooperative's web site to learn how CVEC selected a solar system contractor and evaluated equipment and financing options for a 2 KW solar demonstration project. Details are available at: <http://www.mycvec.com/cvec-solar-project.html>

- General sources for finding PV installers:
 - www.findsolar.com
 - www.getsolar.com
 - www.solar-estimate.org
- Talk to the vendor of your renewable generation system. They will likely have a list of installers for you to consider.
- Start narrowing the list by:
 - Finding installers that are close by.
 - Determining if the installer is state-licensed and/or NABCEP certified (if you are installing a PV system).
- Request bids from your "short list" of potential installers. At least three bids are recommended.
- Obtain three references from each bidder and follow through with checking them. You may want to consider reviewing in person past work the installer has done. Ideally one reference will be for work completed more than a year before to allow you to assess the durability of the product and installation.

Tip: Don't just ask for references, check them, too!

- Verify that the installer is insured and meets worker's compensation requirements.
- Determine if the installer has experience with environmental, permitting, and siting issues or with requirements specific to your area and installation.
- Determine if your renewable generation system is a pre-engineered package that will not require much if any additional design, or if the installer will be required to design some of the system and/or specify some of its components. If design and specification are required, make sure the installer has specific experience in these areas.
- Discuss options for installing a separate meter on the output of your generation equipment. This is required by the State Corporation Commission if you wish to enter into a Power Purchase Agreement with the Cooperative.
- Review specific contractual requests from each bidder.
 - How much is the installer asking to be paid up front?
 - What are the final payment requirements?
 - Are there any other special conditions?
 - Be sure that you understand and agree to any contract before you sign it.
- Ensure that the installer contacts the Cooperative to determine interconnection requirements before finalizing the contract price.
- Determine if any "balance of system" components, such as wiring, switches, etc. that are not being provided by the vendor of your renewable generation system are being provided by you or the installer. If the installer is to provide these, make sure the bid specifically includes what items are to be provided.
- Ask for a warranty on the design, labor, and components provided by the installer.
- Ask whether the product or the components provided by the installer require ongoing maintenance or service and whether the installer can provide that service.

- Ensure the installer has experience with the specific system being installed.
- Select the winning bid.

Things to Keep in Mind During the Installation Phase

- Don't let payments to the installer get ahead of the work.
- Keep a file of all papers relating to your project, including payment receipts.
- Don't make the final payment until you are satisfied with the installation.

Before You Invest In A PV System

- Determine if federal and state tax credits are available to offset the cost of your installation. Visit <http://www.dsireusa.org> for information.
- Make sure you understand how billing credits are calculated under a net energy metering program.
- Investigate options for a Power Purchase Agreement with the Cooperative to sell excess energy generated. This is a one-time opportunity available at the time of interconnection.
- Ask your installer about selling Renewable Energy Certificates to the Cooperative or a third-party energy marketer.

Contact your Cooperative before choosing to install a renewable energy system. We can provide you with the information you will need to determine your responsibilities and requirements related to connecting a generation system to the Cooperative's distribution system. For more information, contact:

Central Virginia Electric Cooperative
 P.O. Box 247
 Lovingson, VA 22949
 (434) 263-8336