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Part 2 - Solar Expert – Or Not?

This weeks Going Green is a continuation of the last issue, wherein we dispelled the myth “Solar power will take 10 years or longer to pay back”, warned folks about the “Sign here, today only” high-pressure sales tactic being used by out of town sales people, and emphasized why you should always get at least three bids (unless you have money to throw away, that is) . If you missed the last issue send me an email (address is at the end of this article) and I'll send you a copy. Also keep in mind that past issues of Going Green are archived here -

<http://www.theenergyguy.com/Articles.html>

This series on solar power in Going Green is something readers have been asking for. And it's something I see a strong need for given the popularity of solar in Nevada County and the level of misinformation being promulgated – even by solar “experts”! Here's a case in point. Among the many online groups I belong to is one called the “Renewable Energy Network”. There has been a very popular topic for months now called “In which renewable energy source would you choose to invest as an individual?” The statements made by so many on this topic are just plain wrong. And that's discouraging given it's a Network of “renewable energy professionals.” So lets take a look at more claims versus the realities.

Claim -

Solar won't help us - we plan to sell our home in 5 years.

Reality -

It will not only save you more than it costs over the next 5 years but it will make your home easier to sell too.

Solar will not only save you money over the next five years it will help, not harm, your chances of selling. In the last issue of Going Green we learned why a solar system financed with a home loan costs less than continuing to pay PG&E – starting in the first year of operation - and how the savings grow every year. This means you're not waiting for some distant “payback” to happen unless you pay cash for your system which very few people do (and in that case the investment would still provide a better return on your money than most anything else, it just won't pay off until you sell).

OK, so what about the next buyer? As energy costs continue to climb home sellers are finding it's easier to sell if their home is affordable to operate. Sure, with solar the home is going to sell for a higher price but the added cost of the future owner's loan will be less than what their utility bills would have been otherwise.

The future of home lending will require building purchasers to be appraised of their total cost of

ownership, and it will include energy. These more sophisticated, comprehensive lending practices are likely to be in effect in 5 years too, so a home with ultra low utility bills will be a much easier sell. In the meantime the NAI (National Appraisal Institute) recently came to the conclusion that a solar system increases the value of a property, at minimum, by the net cost (ie, your cost after incentives). Imagine trying to sell that car you just bought – or that bathroom remodel you just did – for the same price you paid for it!

Claim -

The solar panels will need to be replaced in 10 years.

Reality -

In 50 years they'll be generating more than 80% of the power they're generating today.

Countless studies of 30 year old (plus) solar panels show they lose, on average, about one quarter to one half of one percent of their power output per year. Do the math and you'll find your solar panels will be putting out more than 80% of today's power in 50 years. The power inverters that change the solar panel power into electricity (a much less costly part of every system) are predicted to run 15-30 years before being replaced. I've personally serviced off grid solar systems up on the North San Juan ridge that have been operating for 30 years with no problems other than battery replacements every 5 to 10 years. Of course the majority of systems we're installing today require no batteries, although an increasing number of customers are asking for systems with battery backup.

So there you have it. Two more myths about solar power debunked! Stay tuned for more in the next issue of Going Green!

Ray Darby is President of Sustainable Energy Group Inc., a Grass Valley company offering energy efficiency and solar services for residential and commercial buildings, from comparing the alternatives through installation and servicing of energy systems of all types. You can reach him at 530-273-4422, via email RayDarby@SustainableEnergyGroup.com, or visit their web site at www.SustainableEnergyGroup.com.