



Avoid Misinformation When Going Green

As I went to write today's article, here on Monday October 5th, I have The Union to thank for the subject. Saturday's front page article on Saturday "View from the top" by staff writer Zuri Berry and today's article "Going easy on the earth and your wallet" by Nancy Trejos of the Washington Post had some significant errors people need to be aware of. I should preface what I'm about to say with the recognition that writers aren't necessarily experts in the subjects they write about, and things like deadlines and busy schedules can help even the best writers insert an error from time to time.

Saturday's article in The Union was, in general, an excellent piece on how Nevada County is a leader in solar. The errors in the table on page 8 titled "Solar Companies in Nevada County", however, could have been avoided by simply referring to the California Solar Initiative's page on how to find installers or retailers in your local area (<http://www.gosolarcalifornia.ca.gov/retailers/search-new.php>). I listed this link a few issues back here in "Going Green". Checking this list – as of this morning - two of the seven companies listed by The Union aren't even on the list of eligible solar companies and one isn't a Nevada County company! Those three errors out of seven wouldn't have ruffled my feathers so much if they hadn't neglected to list my company (the #3 installer in Nevada County), Mountain Solar (the #4 company), Erickson Construction (the #5 company) and a few dozen others you can find from that link to eligible installers (source – www.pge.com/csi - see statistics link). I write this not to chew on "sour grapes" but to alert readers interested in solar to the fact that there are dozens of companies doing solar in Nevada County (so I think it's a pretty significant error)! It's also important to appreciate that, unless a company is a registered retailer, installer, or both, a customer won't be eligible for the rebate (hopefully those 2 companies that aren't registered, and haven't installed any systems yet according to the statistics link mentioned earlier, will do so soon)!

Moving on, the "Going easy on the earth and your wallet" article was horrific - rife with errors! In addressing a few of them I hope to educate (re-educate?) my dear readers on the facts.

First, Nancy wrote that installing a solar heating system can cost up to \$100,000. I suppose it's possible to spend that much but, gosh, wouldn't you need an outrageously high annual heating bill for something like that to pencil out? Thinking back over the 30 years I've been involved with solar in Nevada County I'm hard pressed to think of a single system that cost close to even half that much! I can think of dozens of examples, my own remodel/addition included, where the cost to add solar heating was a few thousand dollars or less with payback times on the order of a few years using Passive Solar Design. In my case I spent an extra \$800 on the Passive Solar features needed to solar heat my home and they saved \$455 in propane cost the first year!

But this isn't to say that there aren't folks out there spending tens of thousands of dollars on "Green" solutions that save no where near enough to pencil out over time. A local couple I know spent an extra \$40,000 for an "advanced wall system" that will probably save no more than \$100/year but they were so enamored by the product and so committed to using it from the day they first heard about that they

wouldn't consider my suggestion to look at it from a cost-benefit standpoint! This is a classic example of people reading about "green products" and wandering down the garden path (in the wrong direction), unwilling to be open about the wisdom of their preconceived notions and other alternatives!

The "10 myths about going green" part from the Washington Post had a number of mind-numbing errors. Like #1 "Never leave the lights on when you leave a room" is true, not a myth (but then don't we all already know that?).

Myth #3 read "Switching to solar is a great way to achieve energy savings." Sorry, not a myth, it's true that in a variety of cases solar is the BEST investment one can make in energy savings!

#8 said "you can reduce your carbon footprint by eating locally grown foods" – can someone please enlighten me as to how this is a myth?

And #10, "new homes are more efficient than older homes".... is this a myth or, as most any specialist in energy efficiency is going to tell you, generally true, especially here in California? While there are generally exceptions to every rule, some of these so-called "myths" are generally wrong!

What's the answer? With "Going Green" becoming ever more popular these days it's just one more example of the wisdom of "caveat emptor" or "buyer beware" (or "reader beware" in this case). Before spending any significant amount of money on an energy-saving installation, do some research and get competitive bids and opinions. And lastly, remember the old adage "consider the source"! If it's a sales person or a web site for a product, might the information you get be biased?

Fortunately, today we have the internet and a variety of resources to dip from. And you can always email me at the address below (no phone calls for such things please) and I'll do my best to give you a reliable, trustworthy, unbiased opinion!

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.