

Choosing a Solar Contractor

Installed properly, a renewable energy system can generate energy and save a customer money. But the technology is complex and, as with all complex systems, there can be pitfalls. In addition to technical issues, there is the issue of choosing a contractor who is knowledgeable and trustworthy. Taking the time to educate yourself and carefully choose your contractor can help avoid a painful experience.

HIRE ONLY LICENSED CONTRACTORS

A licensed contractor with the proper classification is required to perform solar installations. Ask for your contractor's license number and verify with the Nevada State Contractors Board ("NSCB") that the license is active and proper for the work to be completed. Visit nscb.nv.gov to verify, or call (775) 688-1141 or (702) 486-1100.

BEWARE OF SCAMS

The NSCB urges consumers to be wary and watch for these red flags:

- Door-to-door solicitations
- Requests for verbal agreements
- High pressure sales tactics
- Demands for cash
- Scare tactics
- Demands for large down payments (the NSCB suggests no more than a 10% down payment)

Visit the NSCB online at nscb.nv.gov for more information on protecting yourself from scams.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK & ASK QUESTIONS

Do your homework about the system you would like to install so that when you meet with a contractor you know what to ask. Some sample questions for installers:

Q: What would your previous customers say about you? Ask the contractor for contact information for three recent customers. Contact them directly and ask if they were satisfied with the work performed. A contractor who does quality work will be happy to provide references. Also consider checking consumer reviews online and contacting the NSCB and the Better Business Bureau (BBB) to see if there are complaints against the contractor. Contact the Northern Nevada BBB at (775) 322-0657 or www.bbb.org/reno/ and the Southern Nevada BBB at (702) 320-4500 or bbb.org/southern-nevada.

Q: Do I need building permits? Building departments generally require an electrical permit for solar installations

and a structural review. Contact your local building department to inquire about permit requirements. Your contractor should get the necessary permits for you.

Q: What brand of panels & inverter do you use? All panels and inverters are not equal. Some are more efficient than others. Some are more prone to power degradation. Some perform better in less than full sunlight. Call distributors and ask for the best panel and inverter combinations or conduct online research.



Q: How will the system be installed? If the system will be mounted on your roof, ask how panel supports will be flashed and caulked to prevent leaks. Make sure holes are not drilled into the roof when it's wet. Check the attic after installation to verify bolts are in the rafters or trusses, not the sheathing. Ask where the inverter will be installed to

ensure there will be adequate air flow and/or shade to keep the inverter cooler on hot summer days.

Q: Will you do a structural analysis? Loads for most solar panels are well under the maximum allowable for most roofs. A structural analysis for solar is pretty basic and should not cost a great deal, but make sure it reflects the actual structure of the supports in your attic. Flying panels in high winds are usually of more concern than the weight of the panels.

Q: What's in the contract? To help consumers understand what they're getting when leasing or purchasing a solar system, or entering into a purchase power agreement, Assembly Bill 405 ("AB 405") specifies the information that must be included in the contract. The Nevada Legislature passed AB405 in 2017 and Governor Sandoval signed it into law June 15, 2017. AB 405 requires solar contractors to provide contracts with a cover page, agreement and disclosure, and outlines the information that must be included in each section. See the fact sheet prepared by the Public Utilities Commission, "Consumer Protections in the Renewable Energy Bill of Rights," for more information on agreement requirements.

Read the proposed contract in its entirety and make sure it includes the information required by AB 405. Make sure it reflects what you understand the agreement to be. If the contractor does not provide clear and direct answers to your questions, don't sign. You have three days after signing the contract to cancel the contract.

Q: How much will the solar system cost? AB 405 requires the contract to specify the amounts due at the signing for and at the completion of the installation of the solar system for leased and purchased systems, as well as power purchase agreements. AB 405 also specifies the information that must be included in the contract regarding any monthly payments, the rate of any payment increases during the term of the agreement, and fees, incentives, or tax breaks factored into the cost of the system, etc.

Q: What percentage of my total power will the installation provide annually? For leased and purchased solar systems, as well as power purchase agreements, AB 405 requires the contract to specify the estimated production of the solar system in the first year of operation. AB 405 also requires that the contract include any guarantees of the performance of the solar system.

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory's online tool, PVWatts Calculator, available at pvwatts.nrel.gov, helps consumers develop estimates of the performance of potential solar system installations.

Q: When will you start & how long will the job take? The installation and electrical hookup should take a couple days. AB 405 requires the solar contract include an estimated timeline for the installation of the solar system. Be aware that interconnecting with the electric utility may also take time.

Q: Is maintenance required? AB 405 requires the solar contract to specify if maintenance and repairs of the solar system are included in the lease or purchase of the system, as well as power purchase agreements. Typically, you'll need to hose off the panels in the cool of the day at least once or twice a year. Maintain good air flow around an inverter located in a garage. If the inverter is mounted outside on a south facing wall, construct a shade structure above it to reduce temperatures. High temperatures from sunlight affect its efficiency and life expectancy.

Q: Is there a warranty? AB 405 requires the contract for the lease or purchase of a solar system, as well as a purchase power agreement, to include a written warranty for the installation of the solar system and penetration into the roof by the solar system, that does not expire earlier than 10 years after the installation of the solar system. AB 405 also requires the contract for the purchase of a solar system to include a written warranty of not less than 10 years for component parts, including parts and labor, of the solar system, either directly from the solar installation company or passed through from the manufacturer of the component parts. The warranty for purchased systems also must include a minimum 7-year warranty for inverters and a minimum 10-year warranty for collectors and storage units.

CONSUMER COMPLAINTS AGAINST SOLAR INSTALLATION COMPANIES

AB405 directed the PUCN to accept consumer complaints concerning solar installation companies. Upon receipt of the complaint, the PUCN's Consumer Complaint Resolution Division may direct you to the appropriate agency or person to resolve the complaint, such as the Nevada State Contractors Board or the Nevada Attorney General.

Compliance investigators are able to assist you Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. You can also submit an informal complaint online anytime at www.puc.nv.gov.

- Northern Nevada: (775) 684-6100
- Southern Nevada: (702) 486-2600

MORE INFORMATION

This fact sheet is a brief explanation of some of the consumer protections outlined in AB 405 for solar system customers. Please see sections 9-24 of AB 405 to learn more about consumer rights and information that must be included in a solar contract. The PUCN's "Consumer Protections in the Renewable Energy Bill of Rights" is another resource that outlines the information provided in sections 9-24 of AB 405.

NORTHERN NEVADA

1150 E. William St.
Carson City, NV 89701-3109
Phone: (775) 684-6101
Fax: (775) 684-6110

Consumer Complaints: (775) 684-6100



SOUTHERN NEVADA

9075 W. Diablo Drive, Suite 250
Las Vegas, NV 89148-7674
Phone: (702) 486-7210
Fax: (702) 486-7206

Consumer Complaints: (702) 486-2600



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