

SOLAR BUYER'S GUIDE

YOUR SOLAR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

We help you look at your options objectively and make sure you know the right questions to ask before signing a solar contract.



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Is Solar Right for Me?

Solar is becoming a popular option for homeowners to save money on their monthly energy costs. The team at Solar Negotiators wants to serve as both a resource and information center for valley residents to look to when reviewing their options. Solar installation is a viable option for homeowners planning to stay in their home at least 5 years and paying over \$150 in monthly electricity costs.

Solar should be seen as a long-term investment to your home and the decision process should take that into consideration. Choosing the right company to facilitate your project can make all the difference in how much money you save and how satisfied you are with your purchase down the road.

Solar Negotiators created this Solar Buyer's Guide to serve as a checklist during the consultation process to ensure you get the most out of your investment. Be sure to read this information carefully along with California's Solar Consumer Protection Guide before speaking with any solar provider. Solar Negotiators hopes the insights we provide can help you make the right decision for energy savings.

– *Chris Moran*
Founder & CEO, Solar Negotiators



1.2 Defining Your Energy Needs

The main goal for a homeowner when looking at solar as an investment is to save money on their energy bill. What a lot of people don't know or are confused about when first calling a solar company is how the quoting process works. Why do we need your personal information to price a system?

Why do you ask for my home address and usage?



We Pull Your Utility Data

Your annual energy usage in kilowatts is used to size your solar system. Many times this information is given to the consultant over the phone or at the time of consultation, along with your past 12 months of utility bills.

Evaluation of Roof Space

Your home address used to view your roof online and map out possible locations for the solar system. If you schedule an in-home consultation, your salesperson can evaluate your roof condition and layout.

1.3 Evaluating Your Future in the Home

If you're looking to invest in your financial future with solar, it is important to consider how long you will be living in your home. We recommend homeowners only go solar if they plan on staying in the home for 5 years or more.

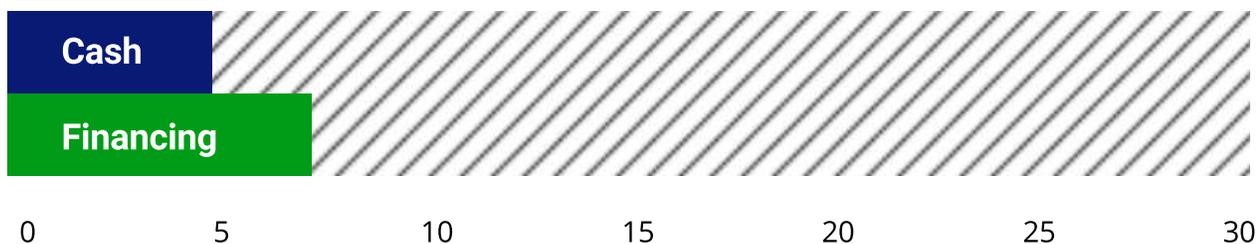
Solar Payback Period

Cash Purchase

- Faster payback (≤ 5 years)
- Near \$0 monthly energy cost
- No interest payments
- High initial investment

Financing Payments

- Longer payback (6.9 average)
- Lower bill by 30-40%
- Interest payments
- \$0 money down required



Will solar increase the value of my home?

Many professionals in the real estate market don't differentiate solar systems based on kilowatt size. A good solution would be to show a prospective buyer your old electric bill before going solar and your current bill. This will be proof of your investment payoff and show the potential of cash savings over the years to come.



2.0 Considerations for Energy Upgrades

Often times, there can be energy upgrades made to make the home more efficient. This is particularly true with older homes. There are a few ways you can determine whether or not making an energy upgrade to your home can be cost-effective:

1. The Age of the House
2. Fluctuating Temperatures
3. Cold Walls, Floors, and Ceilings
4. High Energy Bills

An expert can identify the easiest ways to reduce your monthly energy consumption through an energy audit of your home. Usually with older homes, we find that insulation and window replacement can help homeowners save up to 25% of their monthly power usage. This can often save customers money in additional panels they would have needed, but otherwise can offset with bundling in-home efficiency upgrades to their home.

Insulation	Windows	LED Lights	Whole House Fans	AC upgrade
5% energy savings	10-15% energy savings	.1%/bulb energy savings	1-3% energy savings	7-12% energy savings

“Reduce before you produce.”

Don't spend money you don't have to on additional solar. Consider energy upgrades to reduce the amount of solar you need to effectively power your home. If your home is older than 10 years, energy efficiency upgrades can make a drastic difference in reducing your monthly energy demand.



3.0 Exploring Different Financing Options

Should I buy or lease my system?

Leasing/PPA

- ✓ \$0 Down Required
- ✓ Immediate Energy Savings
- ✓ No Impact on Debt-to-Income Ratio
- ✗ No Payment Increases (1-3% annually)
- ✗ Short-term Loans (20-25 Years)

Solar Ownership

- ✓ \$0 Down Required
- ✓ Immediate Energy Savings
- ✓ Locked-in Monthly Payment
- ✓ Eligible for Federal ITC (26%)
- ✓ 10-12 Year Loan Options

3.1 Solar Investment Timeline



Did you know you can save 4x more money over 25 years if you buy instead of lease.



4.0 Choosing the Right Contractor

4.1 Verify Quality of Work & Experience

Because solar is an investment that is usually made only once, it is important to put a good amount of research into the decision making process.

We recommend getting (3) solar bids before you sign a contract to compare the company's offers and pricing.

There are a lot of great local companies to choose from, but Solar Negotiators prides ourselves on our ability to give our customers a complete solar experience. Not only do we meet all of the following criteria, we take additional measures to ensure our client's energy needs are taken care of as long as they own the system.

Check for these things:

- ✓ **Verify CSLB #**
- ✓ **Check Reviews and References**
- ✓ **Ask About Years in Business and # of Projects**
- ✓ **Review Warranty Information**
- ✓ **Review What Maintenance Plans They Provide**

4.2 California Solar Consumer Protection Guide



What is this document?

As of September 30, 2019, California solar installers are required to provide customers with the California Public Utility Commission's (CPUC) Solar Consumer Protection Guide; a 23-page document with essential information about solar installs.

[Read guide](#)



Can you provide more info?

Watch our video that breaks down this packet. We help new customers better understand this guide and highlight the importance of reviewing this document prior to signing your solar contract.

[Watch video](#)

What are types of things are covered in this document?

- 3-Day Right to Cancellation
- How to Avoid Risk Concerns
- Expected Savings with Solar
- Utility Billing Cycles with Solar
- Claims of "Free Solar" Programs

4.3 Solar Contractor Checklist

DOES YOUR SOLAR COMPANY CHECK ALL THE BOXES?

Verify Contractor's License is Valid and Up-to-Date.....

First, make sure Solar Providers you consider have a valid license from the CSLB. It is illegal for Solar providers and their Installers to conduct business without a license.

- Go to the Contractors State License Board (CSLB) website at www.cslb.ca.gov/consumers or call 800-321-CSLB (2752) to see if the Solar Provider and Installer licenses are active and valid. The licenses must be in the correct classification.

Check Customer Reviews Online & Ask for List of References.....

Reading through online reviews is important because they allow the potential customer to gain insight on how a company conducts business. Past customers share their experience online as a way to let others know if they can trust the company they went with for their solar project.

Have the Contractor Review the Consumer Protection Guide with You.....

Every solar customer in California is now required to read and sign a copy of this document. Skim through and come prepared with questions to ask your salesperson during your consultation. If they are unable or refuse to answer some of your questions, it may be a red flag that they are trying to avoid certain topics.

Ask About the Company's History & Experience.....

Ask about many projects your contractor has installed and how many years they have been around. You can verify this information through the Better Business Bureau's website online at www.bbb.org.

4.4 Questions to Ask Your Salesperson

Price isn't the only important factor.

When looking at different solar quotes, price is the first thing that comes to mind for people. Although it is certainly an important factor, basing your decision on price alone can often times have a long-term negative impact for solar owners.

Cheapest isn't always best, what you want to look at is long-term value. How exactly do these two things differ? We provide long-term value through our solar maintenance and energy management services.

Does your company have a long-term plan for you?

- What Warranties Does Your Company Offer?
- What Maintenance Plans Do they Have you On, If Any?
- Will They Regularly Monitor Your Production for You?
- Do They Have the Staff to take Support Calls for Questions or Issues?



5.0 The Importance of System Care & Maintenance

What can make my solar experience unsuccessful?

A common assumption people make about solar is that it is maintenance free. Although that is partially true, there are fluctuations in your solar production that can occur. These are outlined below along with the steps our company takes to address and minimize the issues for our customers.

Dirty Panels

If you never clean your solar panels as long as you own the system, your production may only decline 33% - however depending how large your system is that could mean hundreds of dollars a month. We clean your panels every single year as long as you're in the home at no cost.

Equipment Failures

Solar Negotiators proactively monitors your solar production and flags major issues immediately to get you back on track as soon as possible. Equipment failures do happen, and we perform what is called an RMA or return merchandise authorization to get you a replacement part under warranty.

System Damage

Issues with production that aren't covered under warranty can arise, i.e. animals chewing on your wiring and bird nesting causing build up of debris. We provide installation of a product called critter guard that can minimize these issues for a one-time cost.

Communication Issues

It is important to be able to effectively monitor your solar production. Issues with your solar inverter's communication can prevent your ability to do so. Our can run diagnostics on your system to pinpoint the problem quickly and affordably.

6.0 Conclusion

You're all set to start your solar journey!

Solar is an investment that looks different for every homeowner, and each family should do their own research and ask a lot of questions. However, if you have a power bill over \$150 per month and you pay federal taxes, solar could be the best investment decision you ever make.

Solar Negotiators hopes that we've helped you look at your options objectively so that you can make an informed decision about solar as an investment for future savings. Our goal with this *Solar Buyer's Guide* was to equip local homeowners looking at solar with the tools they need to make the right choice.

What we reviewed in the Solar Buyer's Guide:

- 1.1 Is Solar Right for Me?
- 1.2 Defining Your Energy Needs
- 1.3 Looking at Your Future in the Home
- 2.0 Considerations for Energy Upgrades
- 3.0 Exploring Different Financing Options
- 3.1 Solar Investment Timeline
- 4.0 Choosing the Right Contractor
- 4.1 Verify Their Quality of Work & Experience
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- 4.3 Solar Contractor Checklist
- 4.4 Questions to Ask Your Salesperson
- 5.0 The Importance of System Care & Maintenance

[Get started here](#)

Want a quote?
Contact us for pricing.

