



News Release

Loma Prieta Chapter

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sierra Club Surveys 131 Northern California cities on Solar Permit Fees and updates study

Several municipalities in Northern California are at the forefront of making solar power systems accessible to middle-income homeowners, according to a survey of 131 jurisdictions in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Benito, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma and Yolo counties. Unfortunately, others impose high permit fees and worse yet have frustrating permit processing delays.

The study found that for typical (3kW) rooftop installations, permit fees range from free in 14 jurisdictions to \$1,298 in Winters. Cities like San Jose issue solar permits over-the-counter without delays, while others such as Santa Clara County take weeks. Some cities seem to use solar permit fees to generate revenue, not just to recover processing costs. State law prohibits this. On 6/7/06, Assembly Member Lois Wolk emailed a letter to all California cities encouraging minimum solar permit fees based on actual permitting costs incurred. Wolk's letter highlights the legislature's intent to promote solar power (see: http://www.norcalsolar.org/downloads/city_resources/WolkPVFeeLetter.pdf).

Kurt Newick, Global Warming Committee Chairman of the Sierra Club's Loma Prieta Chapter said, "Solar panels generate lots of power precisely when people need it most on hot summer afternoons when the power grid is strained. Solar Energy is a key solution to global warming. Also the panels shade roofs, thus helping to keep buildings cool during summer heat spells."

Mill Valley resident Marilyn Thomas, who recently installed a solar electric system, said "My first motivation was to save the planet and number two was... my [utility] bill would be less expensive." She has been more than satisfied. "I have been paying about \$5 a month [for electricity]".

Gary Gerber, President of Sunlight and Power (a solar installation company), said: "People are [installing PV systems] for the pure, straight economics of it. I still get comments like... *I want to get away from PG&E.*"

"The study's goal is persuade city governments with high permit fees and long processing times to look at what the more progressive towns in our area are doing for solar power," said study author and Sierra Club member Carl Mills. "This study is an extension of one published two years ago by the Sierra Club, Loma Prieta Chapter. As a result of that study and the follow up campaign, the average solar permit fee in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties fell from \$652 to \$252. With this latest study, we hope to have as much success in other northern California communities."

The Sierra Club formally contacted dozens of city officials over the past 2 years to encourage their governments to review solar permit fees resulting in 60 cities reducing fees with many more reviewing them!

You can download the study from: http://lomaprieta.sierraclub.org/global_warming/pv_permit_study.pdf

For more information about the campaign to reduce solar permit fees, see:
http://lomaprieta.sierraclub.org/global_warming/fee_study.htm