



# CHOOSING A SOLAR INSTALLER: GET THE RIGHT INFORMATION AND WATCH OUT FOR SCAMS

## What To Find Out from A Potential Solar Installer

### 1. Certifications and Organizational Memberships

- Are their employees certified by the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP)? This verifies that installers are trained and tested to industry standards. NABCEP-certified solar installers are listed at [www.NABCEP.org](http://www.NABCEP.org), under “Professional Directories.”
- Is the company a member of the Kentucky Solar Energy Industries Association (KSEIA), and have they agreed to the SEIA Solar Business Code?

**2. Electrical Expertise:** Ask if your installer has Journeyman or Master level electrician expertise in-house. You might prefer to avoid companies that subcontract installation rather than doing it themselves.

**3. Roofing Issues:** Ask if your installer uses approved solar roofing products to protect against leaks for the next 25 years. Ask for specification sheets on the products they use to learn more.

**4. Training of Company Employees:** Ask if the person designing the system is fully trained in the technical, electrical, design, and regulatory aspects of solar.

### 5. Determining your Suitability for Solar and Likely Production:

- Will the installer visit your home for a detailed review of shading, roof, electrical and structural details?
- Will the installer use specialized shade reading equipment to provide accurate, site-specific energy production estimates?
- Will your system be designed by a qualified solar professional?

### 6. Return on Investment Calculations:

Ask for detail of how the installer calculates your financial return on investment (ROI). • Does the ROI calculation use a percentage escalator for future utility rates, and if so, what percentage do they use? <sup>1</sup>

- Does the ROI calculation consider the degradation of solar panel power output over time?

**7. Permits, Inspections, Connections:** Will your installer handle all permitting, inspections, interconnection, and net metering applications?

**8. Background Checks:** Does your installer provide background checks of all installation, sales, and office staff?

### 9. Warranties:

Three types of warranties can be associated with a solar panel system:

- Equipment warranties. The materials warranty and output warranty on the solar panels can be different, so ask. Some materials, like the inverter, offer extended warranties.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), *electricity prices have increased 1.8% per year in the United States for the past 25 years, from a national average price of 8.38 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) in 1994 to 13.01 cents/kWh in 2019 (the most recent year for which annual data is available). If you go back to 1960, the average annual rate increases to about 2.8%.* - <https://www.solarreviews.com/blog/average-electricity-cost-increase-per-year> )

•Workmanship warranty. Ask how long the workmanship warranty is and how long the company has been in business, and how many systems they have installed.

• 3<sup>rd</sup> party extended warranty (if offered). This warranty would be backed by someone other than the company doing business. The extended warranty can cover everything from workmanship, to parts, to labor for up to 25-30 years. Good questions to ask are, who backs the extended warranty, what does it cover, and is it transferable?

**10. Track Record:** Does your installer have a history of successful projects? Ask for a list of local references.

### **Watch Out for Scams and Hard Sell Tactics**

- 1. Do they push you into a quick signing?** Be sure they allow you time to think.
- 2. Are they offering false freebies?** Instant “Rebates” may just bring rates down to the price of competitors, or hide the fact that their rates are above market and will cost more in long term.
- 3. Are their incentives time limited?** Suggesting that a special financing rate or incentive is only available for a very short time (e.g., 48 hours) is designed to pressure you into signing on the spot.
- 4. Watch out for excessive charges for getting out of the contract** or making changes in the contract.
- 5. Watch out for attempts to over-inflate the projected return on investment** (for example, they may overestimate future utility rate increases. Get details on how the return on investment is calculated).
- 6. There are many brands of solar panels and designs to choose from.** Contractors should not imply that a solar system with battery storage or a single brand of technology is the only option available.

**To learn more,** read “How to Spot a Solar Scam” at:

<https://www.solarunitedneighbors.org/news/how-to-spot-solar-scams/>

### **Watch Out for Misleading Advertising**

- 1.** Ads may look like an article from an independent publication with a picture of a politician or government official appearing to sign legislation.
- 2.** Ads might exaggerate the up-front costs of a solar installation and make it look like getting financing is the only option.
- 3.** Ads may put false time or area limits on their financing, or falsely claim government sponsorship.

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### **Always get Multiple Quotes**

To find a solar installer, visit [www.kyses.org](http://www.kyses.org).