

Let The Sun Shine In

Solar Power is the Way of Florida's Future

Welcome to the Sunshine State! We do a pretty good job here of soaking up the sun. Just about every house or housing community has a swimming pool, golf course, and trails. The beaches are full of people catching rays, and many architecture styles are specially designed to take advantage of the natural light. That being said, besides vitamin D, sunburns, and illumination, there's a HUGE benefit from the sun that many are not taking advantage of: solar power.

Think about it – for the amount of unobstructed sunshine that is regularly roasting our roofs and parking lots, the handful of panels that you see scattered around the state is incredibly disproportionate. According to research that ranks states' solar potential based on the amount of high-quality sunshine, Florida has the third highest rating in the whole country. However, we are only thirteenth in the nation for the amount of solar that is installed.

So what gives? Why isn't Florida living up to its name of the Sunshine State? One of the largest reasons is that Florida does not currently allow power purchasing agreements (PPA), a financing mechanism that is adopted in all but three of the states. PPAs allow a home or business owner to enter into an agreement with a company to have solar installed on the roof and only pay a monthly rate for the energy produced



Studies published by *Forbes*, *Newsday*, and others have all reported that solar panels can increase property values by up to 4%. Real estate agents use solar panels as a selling point, and it's seen as a highly coveted upgrade on a home. Many residents have found that not only have they recouped the initial cost of the panels when the property is sold later, but that they actually made an additional premium after the value of the property was raised.

by the panels, similar to a phone or car payment. The solar company makes that investment. It's a mechanism that has worked well in other states, and many in Florida are currently pushing for PPAs to be allowed here as well. There is even a ballot initiative in motion to get it on the general election ballot in 2016. This initiative is headed up by a group called Floridians for Solar Choice, and you can learn more about them at www.flisolarchoice.org.

In addition to political efforts, many home and business owners in Florida are making a personal decision to go solar. Ray Johnson, owner of a solar installation company and training facility located in Fort Lauderdale, receives calls every day from local residents who want to go solar or learn how to work in solar. "A typical home solar power system can eliminate three to four tons of carbon emissions annually," explains Johnson. "It's also a financial choice. Think of a solar system as an investment or asset that you are adding to your property."



Home and business owners can also earn credit towards their energy bills through their solar systems. We currently have a net-metering policy in place through Florida Power and Light (FPL) that allows people to shrink their monthly bill based on how much solar power they are generating. In the last few years, FPL has been installing smart electric meters throughout their territory in order for their customers to have a more accurate picture of their energy usage. People can now see their hourly, daily, and monthly energy usage online with FPL's Energy Dashboard tool, as well as how much solar energy they are generating and how much credit toward their bill they are receiving.

The Russo family in Delray Beach knew that they wanted to go solar as soon as they moved down from New York. "For me, going solar is really not a 'choice' but more a 'Hello! Of course' situation," homeowner Raina Russo explained. Russo, also the founder of #SolarChat and Women4Solar, first chose to go solar when her family lived in New York, and the decision to add it to her new Florida home was an easy one. "I'm really happy that my family is going solar," said eleven-year-old Coby. "I am proud to be saving the planet and I love being part of a solar family."

For fourteen-year-old Dani Russo, going solar also means setting an example for other Floridians to do the same. "I think putting solar panels on our roof is an amazing thing that will hopefully inspire other to do the same," she explained. Maybe Florida can live up to its Sunshine State name after all. 