

## Guide to Selecting A Solar Equipment Installer

The following guide focuses on solar installers, those designing, installing, and maintaining solar hot water systems and/or solar electric (PV) systems. Most of the remarks apply to the selection of an installer of *any* type of energy system. We focus here on solar hot water and PV simply because this is where the bulk of the action is, currently. Much of this guide consists of little more than common sense. For a useful article, see “Choosing Your RE Installer,” Home Power Magazine #127 (October/November 2008), pp. 48-52.

- Hire an **experienced** installer and one who **has done recent installations**:
  - How many years has the company been in business?
  - How many years has the installer been installing systems of the type that are of interest to you?
  - How many systems in total has the installer installed?
    - The more systems installed, the more situations the installer has had to deal with.
  - In considering “recent” installations, these should be of the same technology you are considering; that is, if you are wishing to install a solar domestic hot water system, then it is systems of that type that he/she should have recently installed.
  - If an inexperienced installer counters with “Well, everyone has to start somewhere, and this is a new type of business,” recognize that, first, this is no longer a new type of business, and second, people starting out in a business like this should gain experience by working under a contractor who *is* experienced.
  - Get a list of customers for whom this installer has installed systems, and contact some of them.
    - Is the installer listed in Find Solar (<http://www.find-solar.org>)? If so, what is the installer's customer rating?
- Pick an installer with the **appropriate background**.
  - What kind of training has he/she had?
  - Is he/she professionally certified?
    - The North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP) offers certification in solar electric and solar hot water technologies.
  - If the system to be installed is solar domestic hot water, does the installer have a background in plumbing? If the system to be installed is solar electric, does the installer have a background in electricity?
  - Does the installer pursue ongoing training for him/herself and his/her crew?
- Make sure your installer is **insured** (or, even better, insured and bonded).
- What is the **quality and variety of brands** of systems and components the installer is prepared (and qualified) to install?
  - Once you learn this, you might need to do some research. At the very least, the installer should be able to explain to you why he/she uses these brands, and part of the explanation should involve quality.
- Does the installer **live with** the type of system in question? That is, if it is a solar domestic hot water system that you are planning to install, ask the installer whether he/she lives with a solar hot water system; likewise if it is solar electricity that is intended.
  - It is certainly not a necessity that the installer be living with a system of the type that is of interest to you. But installers who do live with these systems have a better understanding of what the customer is going to experience down the line, and they are likely to design/install/maintain accordingly.

- Does the installer offer a **service contract**? Does he/she provide **warranty service**? What kind of **maintenance** is the installer prepared to provide? Does the installer recommend periodic maintenance? Why or why not? What is the maintenance history on systems that the installer has installed?
- **Do not select on the basis of price alone.**