Watch Out for Solar Scams

Thousands of Kentuckians across the state are saving money on their electric bills through rooftop solar installed by reputable local companies. But there are also companies operating here that are making big promises that don't deliver, locking you into a costly solar installation that's overpriced, improperly designed, unpermitted, or poorly installed.

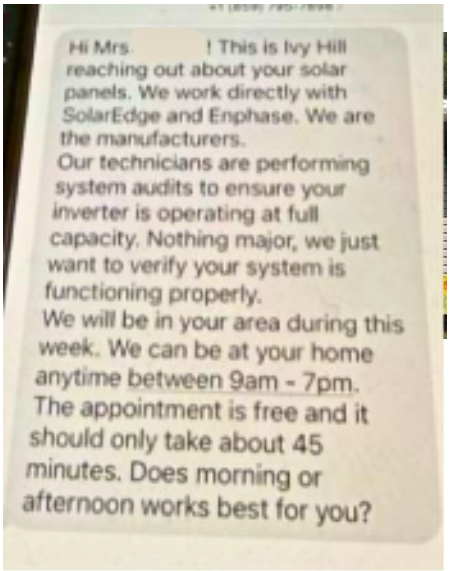
So how do you tell the difference? Here are some warning signs to look out for:

- "Get paid to install solar!" "No up-front cost with this special government program!" "Available only in your area!" "Limited time offer!" If an installer makes these types of promises, proceed with caution. In Kentucky, there are no state, federal, or utility programs that will pay you to install solar, or that offer financing with no up-front cost.

- Aggressive sales tactics and "instant rebates." If someone wants you to sign up on the spot, or within a very limited window, that's a red flag. A reputable installer won't pressure you to make a big investment without time to fully think it over or to get quotes from another installer.

- They offer you a quote without looking at your electric bills or without first recommending or asking about past efficiency upgrades. Your installer should be familiar with your utility's solar net metering rates and should design a system that maximizes the financial benefit to you.

- If you already have solar, watch out for "free" offers to "inspect" your array, even if they say they're representing a company involved with your installation. They may be trying to get in the door to sell you on batteries or another costly service you don't need. If you're net-metered, a battery won't save you much, if any, money on your electric bill.



A text from a scammer received by one of our clients.

Tips for Doing Your Due Diligence

A qualified, reputable solar installer will:

- Have North American Board of Certified Energy Professionals (NABCEP)-certified solar professionals on staff and/or be a NABCEP Accredited Residential PV Installation Company. This is the gold standard for solar installers. Look for installers at NABCEP.org. You can also find a list of Kentucky installers at KYSES.org.

- Provide you with staff or subcontractor qualifications. Don't be afraid to ask for a copy of the KY Contractor License Number or Master License Number for the person pulling the electric permit.

- Do a site visit before finalizing a design and quote. While technology has made it easy to do initial solar assessments remotely, an installer should come to your home or business to do an in-person assessment before offering you a contract to sign.

- Handle permitting, inspections, utility interconnections and net metering applications. They should give you a copy of the net metering application submitted to the electric service provider if you ask for it.

- Fully explain how they calculate your estimated electric bill savings over the life of the installation. If they are incorporating electric rate increases by your utility, they should be reasonable – no more than 5% per year.

- Give you time to consider your options and get additional quotes. Although there are situations that might warrant higher or lower installation costs, for residential solar installations you should expect installed cost to be around $2,500 to $3,500 per installed kW. Larger commercial installation costs are typically $2,000-$2,400 per installed kW.

- Reputable battery installers will work with you to determine what you want to back up when the power goes out. Whole-home battery backup will be very expensive - make sure to compare it to the cost of a backup gas generator.

When in doubt, talk to an expert!

The Mountain Association provides unbiased, third party solar assessments and advice to local governments, small businesses, nonprofits and faith-based organizations in Eastern Kentucky.

Contact our Energy Team at energy@mtassociation.org or (859) 880-3904.