

A debate brews over solar panels

Thanks for the exposé on the pitfalls of leasing solar arrays ["Complaints Heat Up as rooftop solar cools," News, Sept. 2]. About 6 years ago, the local solar companies warned LIPA of what was likely to happen. I hate to say, "We told you so!"

Unfortunately, the national solar companies, backed by Wall Street money, decimated the locals with huge marketing capital and the promise of "free" solar, preying on communities that could least afford solar with promises that could never be met. Unscrupulous salespeople peddled green attributes, but the only thing they cared about was the green that filled their pockets. Tens of thousands of homeowners bought into their story, only to find that the claims of savings were way overstated.

These companies should be held accountable. Systems that don't meet the promises made should be removed at no expense to the homeowner and their homes should be brought back to the condition before installation.

Solar works when the application is right, the homeowner has a modest tax appetite and has good credit. Solar is good! Climate change is real! Our future depends on us making the right choice.

*Mike Bailis,
Oakdale*

Editor's note: The writer is the chief sales officer of SUNation Solar Systems in Ronkonkoma.

In light of all the bad publicity about solar power purchase agreements, I would like to share a positive experience. My panels went online in July 2016. They were installed and are currently maintained by Trinity Solar. A system analysis found that one of my panels was not functioning properly and within two days the problem was rectified.

My agreement is with Sun-run. I reviewed the contract with me and explained that my initial annual cost would increase by 2 percent a year. That was spelled out in my contract.

I use a spreadsheet to track my LIPA and solar power bills and am on track to save about \$1,500 this year. During the



Technician installs solar panels on the roof of a home in North Massapequa in November.

planning process, Trinity sent out a technician to determine "true north" and they also assessed how many kilowatt-hours a system will produce based, upon shading and other factors.

I am very happy with my solar installation and I am also happy with the two companies that manage my system.

*Jeffrey Schein,
Hauppauge*

Thomas Maier and Mark Harrington wrote an insightful and helpful special report exposing some of the unsavory elements of an otherwise extraordinary and invaluable solar industry.

But those of us who work in this field, and who do so honestly and in a customer-focused manner, want readers to remember all the benefits that come from "going solar": Energy independence, cleaner air (with less pollution and fewer toxins), and financial benefits for the consumer.

While the article mentions some of the pitfalls in the industry, New York State has created a program that solves many problems: the NY-Sun On-Bill Recovery Loan. It requires that the proposed plan is evaluated by the state Research and Development Authority, and approved only if the system will provide savings for the owner.

Also, the NY-Sun On-Bill Recovery Loan allows property owners to pay any costs via their regular PSEG bill. Because the payment is tied to the utility bill, there's no lien filed against the customers' property, which means there's no difficulty when it's time to sell or refinance.

*David Michael,
East Meadow*

Editor's note: The writer is CEO of NY State Solar, a Long Island seller of solar systems.

While we agree with your "5 Tips for Avoiding Solar Pitfalls," you omitted the most important one — buy your panels, don't lease them. In a leasing arrangement, the installer will always make money while the homeowner will assume all the risk, and you will never reach a point where you're using the sun's energy for free. Our array paid for itself in less than 6 years and we've been getting free electricity for over a decade. And with the addition of our plug-in electric Chevy Bolt, it's a real bonanza!

*Daryl Altman
and Rob Shepard,
Lynbrook*

Your story about solar leasing was only half true. Nothing was written about the many satisfied customers who either

leased or purchased solar panels for their homes.

In 2012, we purchased solar for our home. Before doing so, we researched manufacturers and installers. We learned that the southern roof pitch would be best and trees blocking sunlight would limit electric production. We determined that it would take seven years or less to break even. We changed most our lighting to LED and a few years ago purchased a high-efficiency air conditioner.

Our success with solar inspired us to go the next step and buy an all electric vehicle. My wife and I are both in our mid-70s. We are more than satisfied with the solar panels. Solar has enabled us to considerably reduce our carbon footprint and also has helped to make living on Long Island affordable.

*Joseph Contegiacomo,
North Hempstead*

Kudos to Newsday reporters Thomas Maier and Mark Harrington on their incisive report of the solar panel industry on Long Island [Special Report, Sept. 2]. The report underscores the devious practices being perpetrated by solar panel companies.

I entered into a lease agreement with Vivant Solar to install panels on my house in August 2015, on the strength of our salesman assuring me that I

would see a reduction in my energy costs of between 30 to 40 percent annually. I have since tracked my energy costs for the two years before the solar panel installation and the two years after installation and have not experienced any reduction in energy costs. Numerous complaints to Vivant Solar have fallen upon deaf ears.

What is needed is either governmental intervention into the practices engaged in by solar companies or a class action suit to extricate unwary customers from lease agreements that are based on false and deceptive promises.

*Frank M. Marlow,
Huntington*

I was surprised to read the article regarding complaints about solar panels. Before I cry "fake news," let me give you some facts you did not report, especially regarding Solar City.

My husband and I signed up with Solar City about four years ago and took advantage of rebates available then. It did not "prey" upon us because we are seniors. We approached Solar City, looking to reduce our high energy costs. Before you sign up with any reputable company, an in-depth evaluation has to be done regarding efficiency. That includes placement of the panels and any obstructions that might cut back on efficiency, like large, shady trees. It is a rigorous process that, for us, included having to remove two trees.

We have had nothing but great success with our solar energy installation, reducing our costs by more than half.

Solar City keeps track of the efficiency of our panels and has even sent us money to have the panels cleaned and have remaining trees cut back. Please do your due diligence when reporting on solar energy and get multiple sides to a story.

*Susan Floss,
Hicksville*

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