

How to Choose a Professional Solar Installer in Kentuckiana

Solar photovoltaic (PV) installations are becoming more common in Kentuckiana due to the 30% federal tax incentives and government grants from States and other funding agencies. This has also led to a number of new and inexperienced solar companies in the marketplace. Some of these companies may be out to deliberately take advantage of customers. When considering the addition of a solar system to your home, it is very important to choose a reputable, professionally-trained installer. You can decrease your chances of entering into a “bad deal” by doing a little research and asking a few simple questions. After all, you are considering spending and investing in a renewable system that can range from \$10,000 on up for a solar photovoltaic array.

In choosing an installer, there are several key things to be aware of. Like most professional fields, the solar field has a national board that grants certification to those individuals who have passed a professional test. The North American Board of Energy Practitioners, also referred to as NABCEP, is responsible for certifying solar professionals. Ask the installer you are considering if they are NABCEP certified. Don't just take his/her word for it, but go to the NABCEP website to confirm it. You can also ask the installer for references, but keep in mind that these can be false. It is better if you can visit a solar installation and ask the owner his/her experience in dealing with the renewable energy company you are considering. Google the company name and see what additional information, other than what the company has posted on their website, you can find.

What type of background does your installer have? Is previous work experience in a related industry or is their previous experience in an industry that is totally unrelated to solar, electrical, engineering, or roofing trades? For example, in a down economy, companies that might have been installing windows, siding, gutters, heating and air-conditioning systems or any other such home improvements might decide to become a “solar company” and jump on the “solar bandwagon”. In this case, you should wonder how such previous experience translates to a technical industry such as solar. A qualified solar company has the necessary skills to deal with high voltage DC electricity, roof waterproofing, structural integrity and safety of your home.

Is the potential installer making production claims without a proper site-visit or without appropriate information? One such local company is known to promise customers a 54% reduction in energy bills without even doing a proper site assessment or knowing the homeowner's electric bills and level of energy efficiency. Is the installer pressuring you for a quick sale? These type of systems are not usually sold on a single interaction with a company. It usually takes time to perform the proper site assessment and to design a system that is efficient and optimized to your particular situation and needs.

Is the company playing price games with you? Have they reduced cost considerably on several occasions to make a quick sale when you indicate that you cannot afford it? This only indicates that the initial price was too high and they were trying to gouge you. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Finally, is the installer trying to sell you on unproven new technology? Standard solar panels are either mono-crystalline or poly-crystalline. These technologies have a history of proven track records with life expectancies of 40 or more years. The relatively newer technologies do not have enough time to have an established performance record. This may be reflected in a shorter warranty offered by the manufacturer of the technology. Most standard panels have a warranty of 20 or more years. You should be careful of newer technology and do your research before committing.

Asking these basic questions, may help keep you from being taken advantage of by scam artists. Remember: solar photovoltaic systems have been around for a long time and have a proven history for performance in the proper circumstances as well as a long life expectancy. Don't let bogus solar installers reduce the value of your solar investment.