



News Release

Loma Prieta and San Francisco Bay Chapters
Palo Alto, CA

April 27, 2009
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sierra Club Launches Campaign to Encourage Cities in Silicon Valley to Lower Solar Permit Fees for Non-residential Systems

The Sierra Club (Loma Prieta and San Francisco Bay chapters) has initiated a campaign to encourage municipalities in Silicon Valley to facilitate the installation of large-scale solar power systems on non-residential structures by lowering permit fees. On 4/1/09, the Sierra Club formally asked municipalities with unreasonably high non-residential solar permit fees to consider lowering them to cost-recovery levels.

In 2008, Sierra Club volunteers surveyed all the municipalities in Alameda, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties to determine their estimated permit fees for installing a roof-mounted photovoltaic (PV) solar electric system on a non-residential building. Such structures can include commercial office buildings, stores, industrial facilities, schools, churches, government and non-profit buildings. The volunteers conducted this survey for three system sizes (8 kW, 49 kW and 131 kW). It may be the first survey published in the U.S.A. for non-residential PV permit fees.

Many of the surveyed cities have little or no experience permitting large PV systems and were unsure how to respond to this survey. Others were confident in their responses, as their governments may have formally adopted PV permit fee schedules. [NOTE: these solar permit fee policies may be partly the result of the Sierra Club's solar permit fee campaign for residential systems conducted between 2005 and 2007 in the Bay Area].

On April 1, 2009, the survey team contacted 16 municipalities that have fees greater than \$5,000 for the 131 kW system size. The team did this to notify these cities that their solar permit fees were unreasonably high and request that they review their solar permit fee calculation methods, since they might be charging fees higher than cost-recovery levels. Charging more for solar permits than the reasonable costs to administer them violates California Government Code Section 66014, which provides that fees associated with building inspections and building permits "*shall not exceed the estimated reasonable cost of providing the service for which the fee is charged.*"

Between 4/1/09 and 4/17/09, some of those 16 municipalities have confirmed they are reviewing their PV permit fee policies. Several others have promptly reduced fees to more appropriate levels.

Since local sunlight and available roof space are plentiful, only the number of installations limits the production potential of solar power. This news release and solar permit fee campaign are acknowledging city leaders for taking action to make solar energy more affordable, particularly for businesses and non-profit entities.

The attached chart shows PV permit fees for non-residential buildings for jurisdictions in the surveyed region.

Non-residential Solar Permit Fee Campaign:

http://lomaprietaglobalwarming.sierraclub.org/Solar_Initiative_Files/CommercialPVSurvey.php