

NEWS

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Advocates Urge Commission to Kick-Start Florida's Solar Industry

TALLAHASSEE—Florida has a chance to plug into the power of the sun. The Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) votes next week on a policy that promotes the use of solar energy among consumers and creates a more robust solar energy industry in Florida.

On Tuesday, March 4, the PSC will vote on a proposed rule to allow “net metering,” a type of billing where customers who create their own energy with solar electric systems would be able to send any excess power back to the utility and receive billing credit. This new “net metering” regulation allows consumers who install solar electric systems to receive virtually the same dollar amount as the utility for each kilowatt they create.

Currently, the Sunshine State is one of a handful of states that does not have a statewide net metering standard in place, according to the Florida Solar Energy Industries Association and Vote Solar, two champions of solar energy in Florida.

“Solar energy is Florida’s greatest renewable resource and provides consumers with a reliable source of electricity that is available every day – even during blackouts and hurricanes,” said Bruce Kershner with the Florida Solar Energy Industries Association. “The Florida PSC is set to take smart steps to spur growth of this clean industry, create more Florida jobs, and promote increased energy independence in the state. It’s a win all around for Florida.”

Under the proposed rule, when a consumer generates more energy than they consume, a credit will appear in the next billing cycle. Credits will accumulate and continue to offset customer billing for 12 months, after which any remaining credit will be paid to the customer at the utility's "avoided cost."

“Adoption of a strong net metering program is a giant step forward in removing barriers and encouraging the development of the solar industry in Central Florida and renewable energy production in the state of Florida,” said Orange County Mayor Richard T. Crotty.

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Net metering is a win-win for everyone. It alleviates stress on electric grids during peak time, which in turn reduces the amount of electricity a utility has to produce during peak hours.

Billing solar electric system owners on a net consumption basis makes solar systems more affordable for the customer. Net metering also promotes the development of new solar capacity.

“Just as the ‘oil patch’ in Texas helped fuel America in the Twentieth Century, we are witnessing the establishment of a ‘solar patch’ in the Sunshine State that will help energize the Twenty-First Century, thanks to the visionary leadership of Gov. Charlie Crist,” said Gwen Rose of The Vote Solar Initiative. “Important policy decisions, like those before the PSC next week and being considered by the Florida Legislature during the 2008 session, will chart the course for years to come.”

For more information on solar energy in Florida, please visit the Florida Solar Energy Industries Association Web site at www.flaseia.org and The Vote Solar Initiative Web site at <http://www.votesolar.org/state-initiatives/florida.html>.

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