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Eco-nomics: Solarizing your home, business makes sense

*Vincent Battaglia
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With the passage of the Palm Desert's Energy Independence Loan Program (Assembly Bill 811), the Governor has clearly taken a leading role in accelerating the incorporation of energy efficiency into the daily lives of Californians.

Although solar energy systems do pay for themselves over time and then provide a continuous supply of inexpensive energy after that, the up-front costs for installation can prove to be an insurmountable barrier for many looking to help themselves and the planet.

With this act, the Palm Desert, and hopefully other valley cities and municipalities beyond our region, will allow their residents to spread the initial cost of energy efficiencies over a maximum of 20 years on their annual property tax bills at a low interest rate. And best of all, the program is available to both residential and commercial properties. The solar energy system stays with the property even if it is sold, and the new owner can assume the assessment's remaining balance, if one exists.

This means that anyone who would like to explore increasing the energy efficiency of their home or business now has every reason to participate in owning their own renewable energy source. And since assessments are likely to be the equivalent of, or less than, what property owners save on their electric bills, it makes sound financial sense.

Beyond the home

In addition to homes, solar should be explored by all commercial businesses, country clubs, golf resorts, office building owners and more. Traditional energy costs will not decrease for automobiles; we seem to have come to terms with this, though we can also expect the same for the cost of energy for our homes and businesses. While we wait for additional ways to offset the high cost of gasoline, we can immediately address the high cost of electricity.

Before you go solar, employ someone to conduct a thorough and complete energy audit which includes recommendations and suggestions on how and who to implement them. To simply "solarize" without first reducing your energy usage would be defeating the whole purpose of reducing your energy impact, and ultimately cost more if a larger solar energy system than needed is installed.

If you have large electric bills, if your home faces to the south, if there aren't a lot of trees, which shade your roof, you should be among the first to call. If your home or business meets even some of these preferences, energy efficiencies will lead the way to lower electric bills and the installation of solar will continue it.

Exciting times

I applaud the city of Palm Desert and the Office of Energy Management for helping lead the way on this bill, trumping even the energy conscious city of Berkeley. I am excited about what this means for our valley as we strive to set an example for the rest of California, the country and the world in the space of sustainability. This will make it much easier for even more people to take tangible steps to do their part, as well as save money.

In fact, Greenpeace calls the next generation the solar generation, and there's no age requirement. Let's all be part of the solar generation. We'll make our kids proud.

Vincent Battaglia is president of Renova Energy & Solar, founded in Palm Desert, and is a co-founder of the U.S. Green Building Council Inland Empire.