

(This is an early edition, revisions coming soon)

Ten Questions Tucson Solar Reps HATE Answering

Hi all,

I'd like to take just a moment and thank you for subscribing and downloading this short guide to help prepare you for your exploration into solar power for your home.

If you got this from a friend and appreciate the information, you might consider heading on over to <https://tucsoninsider.com/> to subscribe to the Tucson Solar Insider newsletter. It's fun, informative, and free.

This is more or less meant to be a short discussion to help you formulate your own set of questions when doing your research into solar power for your Tucson home.

This just scratches the surface and is by no means a complete list of things to consider...

For a fuller picture, the Tucson Solar Insider Desk Guide for Buying Solar might be what you want...

Ok, the goods... (in no particular order, it is all important)

“What is the registered name of the Tucson business?”

I am not saying that all of the companies MUST be in Tucson, but...

The best way for me to highlight this concept is through a fictitious (but completely possible) story:

A non-local solar sales company pays for a lead generation company (also not local, often outside the US) to advertise in the Arizona Daily Star. They put up some enticing pictures and promises, you get curious and fill in the questions- boom, your data is collected and provided to the non-local solar sales company.

The non-local sales company hires an appointment setter company (also not local) who employs virtual assistants (VAs) to call or otherwise contact (maybe in private messages, texts, or emails?) you and attempt to ‘qualify’ you by making sure you have the right level of credit and income and also try to get you to set an appointment with their ‘solar expert’.

At this point, it could well be that the lead gen company does all of this or it could be a solar company who does all of these things ‘in-house’, either way- when you agree and book the appointment, you will be talking to a solar sales rep who (in this example) is not located in Tucson and who represents a solar sales company who also is not in Tucson.

Just supposing for a moment you agree with what the solar rep lays out and sign a contract to get solar installed...

It is completely possible that the solar sales company then turns that contract over to an operations team that outsources the engineering of the solar system, the procurement of the equipment and shipping it to the location, hiring the installation crew, and many other things- all to people who do not live in Tucson and do not have businesses registered and operating in Tucson.

The engineering firm could be in Idaho while the procurement services come from Texas and the installation team is a group of traveling contractors who came down from Phoenix that operate in some obscure named LLC that doesn't show up on their trucks, shirts, or paperwork.

It is completely possible that not a single soul in Tucson was associated with this entire process- except for you.

Now, that might not be a bad thing. I'm not saying that ONLY Tucson businesses should be trusted, etc. But what I am saying is you might want to take a moment and imagine what happens AFTER the installation?

What if you have questions? Problems? How are you going to contact 'them', who is 'them'?

Ah- now you see it, I think... The Question is- 'who in Tucson is involved in this?'

“Who are the installers?”

This is related to the above question because it is important to know if it is a local or out of town team but there's more to understand...

Are the installers part of the solar company- a permanent team of trade skilled workers who do nothing but solar installations for the company?

Is it a for-hire contractor with permanent employees? If so, do they specialize in solar installs, roofing, or are they a 'we do it all' kind of contractor...

Maybe it is a contractor who hires day-labor and puts together teams as needed. (this is a no-go for me, how on earth can I expect any quality control of the work if they hire for specific jobs?)

The entire thrust of this idea is that quality of the work is vitally important.

Roofs are easily damaged- they can leak or even be structurally damaged.

Electricity is dangerous- poor workmanship can cause equipment failures or damage, fires, and even dead people.

Damage caused by them can be EXPENSIVE to fix, are they licensed and bonded to do the work?

Bottom line- you might want to know all the gory details about the actual installation team.

“How is the work going to be controlled?”

True story (unfortunately)- “Companies” have installed entire solar power systems on homes without having first gotten the proper permits from the local authorities.

I’m shaking my head as I type this... A solar installation must be approved via the permit process.

What happens if they don’t get a permit first? You guessed right if you said- you can’t hook up your solar power system and turn it on.

That’s like having a car in the garage you can’t start. (but are obligated to make payments on).

In one case, I saw one man just livid- he knew enough to ask the installers if they had the right permits before he let them start the work- they outright LIED and told him yes even though they knew they had no permits at all.

Maybe folks should consider asking to see the actual permits before letting workers onto the property to get started with the work...

“Show me in the contract where it details the future removal and installation of the solar system”

One of the ‘promises’ that seems to come up quite a bit- a feature or benefit where the ‘company’ will remove and reinstall the solar system up to a number of times (usually one removal and one reinstall) so that ‘if you have to do roofing repairs’ or ‘if you move you can take it with you’- all for free.

Um... in what world do skilled labor contractors like roofers, electricians, or even unskilled day laborers work for free?

That doesn’t exist in the real world, so if the sales rep is promising something like that- have them show you the specific wording in the contract that shows exactly what company, the cost, and the process for requesting such removal and reinstall.

“Show me in the contract where it details the future servicing of the solar system”

Again, words spoken are not words written- and the written words are what will stand up in the long run (like in court, etc.)...

If there is any promise of cleaning, periodic maintenance, tuning, monitoring, refreshing, software updates, etc.

Have the rep show you the exact words in the contract.

“Show me in the contract where it details the provisions for what happens if legal action is required”

Seriously- one solar company put a clause in the contract that basically stated that if the customer brings legal action against the company (i.e. sue them), then the customer is obligated to pay \$10k to the company.

Not making this up. Go watch this video and skip to 36:25...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wlr2eFm0TXE>

“Show me in the contract where it details any penalties such as prepayment, etc.”

I'm no fan of Power Purchase Agreements or Leases. Plenty of penalties could be hidden in them and they are usually financially inferior to either cash purchase or purchase via loan.

Many loans come with no prepayment penalty, but some do...

Have the sales rep go over each and every 'penalty' in the contract with you.

“Show me in the contract where it details the provisions for any restrictions”

Similar to penalties, there may be restrictions inserted into those contracts. Like an entry stating that you agree to use ONLY that company to remove or reinstall those panels in the future. That ONLY that company can do maintenance on the system and if performed by anyone else the warranty is voided.

Seriously, I've seen examples where a solar company came back and removed the system so a customer could do roof repairs and then went silent when it came time to re-install... And the customer couldn't hire another company because of the contract so the equipment sat unused all the while the customer had to make payments.

“Show me in the contract where it details the provisions for warranty service”

Go back for a minute and remember the concept from the first question. If nobody is local here in Tucson and you have an inverter go bad during the warranty period, who EXACTLY is going to come take care of that?

What does ‘take care of that’ look like? Someone has to troubleshoot it, someone has to determine if the inverter went bad, someone has to remove the ‘bad’ inverter and install the new one, someone has to process the warranty claim with the manufacturer...

Who, exactly, is going to do that? Are there costs? What are the costs?

Warranty questions are much more complicated than ‘how long’...

“Show me in the state and federal tax laws and statutes where these incentives are and go over them with me so I understand”

At the end of the day, I can't give you tax advice- so please make sure you get valid tax advice from a qualified tax professional...

In the meantime, a real problem in the sales side of the solar industry is to embellish and exaggerate the tax incentives. It is a source of all sorts of misinformation coming directly from the sales rep- so to counter that...

Have the rep show you the actual written tax laws and statutes that describe the incentives they are promising.

You might be surprised to see how quickly that can humble a pushy sales rep...

So... You made it this far without giving up.
That's Awesome!

I don't mean to bang on and on about how 'bad' the solar industry is so much that folks get discouraged and give up.

Quite the contrary- I want as many Tucson homeowners to explore solar power for themselves as can possibly be achieved.

Only a fraction of them will determine that solar is for them and their home, but of those- I want as many to be prepared for the tricks and pitfalls of the industry.

There's plenty of sharks out there, we need to band together and put them in their cages...

Thanks for taking the time to read this. I hope it helps you gain some perspective and that you come away with a few more questions to keep in mind as you go about your solar search.

If you want to dig deeper...

The "Tucson Solar Insider Desk Guide for Buying Solar" might be what you want...

Be Good!
Curtis

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