



Solar Neighbourhoods

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How to Select a Solar Contractor

A good dealer will help you select a solar water heater that meets your specific needs. The dealer should provide all necessary operating information, explain maintenance requirements, warranty coverage and in the case of seasonal water heaters, the operating temperature limits.

If possible, restrict yourself to dealers who can offer a warranty on both parts and labour and who have a successful track record of satisfied customers. Also ask to view a solar water heater installed by the dealer in your community.

Consultation with a dealer should include a visit to your home so the dealer can make an accurate estimate of the installation cost and help you make the final decision on where the collectors and the storage unit should be placed.

When choosing a solar water heater to meet your basic requirements, consider the following:

- How much hot water am I using? Will it change in the future? The size of the system should match your hot water needs
- What are the pros and cons of a year-around or seasonal system and will they meet my lifestyle and water consumption needs?
- What is an ideal location for the placement of the solar collector array on the roof?

If you need additional assistance in deciding if your home is appropriate for solar hot water please ask for our *Solar Neighbourhoods' Homeowner Solar Site Assessment Questionnaire*. You'll receive a written report and additional advice to assist you in your purchasing decision.

Choose a solar water heater that:

- Meets current CSA standards or will be approved by your local building inspector.
- Has warranty coverage on labour, parts, collectors, tank.
- Has support from a local dealer or installer.

Your purchase should include the same considerations as those involved in purchasing any new appliance:

- Consider the dealer's reputation and experience.
- Examine the limitations of the warranty.
- Ask for photos or to view completed installations.
- Inquire about follow-up service and maintenance arrangements.
- Review all contracts and agreements.
- Obtain more than one written estimate.

Questions to ask the solar contractors:

The following questions can be used to help evaluate your solar contractor's suitability and match to your specific needs.

A. Specific to Your Installation:

1. How long will it take for the equipment to be ordered and delivered?
2. What happens if any of the equipment is damaged before it is actually installed?
3. How long will the installation process take?
4. When do you expect to begin and fully complete this project?
5. What would be your typical daily schedule?
6. How and when will I be contacted if no one is to show up on a particular day?
7. Who will be assigned as project supervisor for the job?
8. Who will be working on the project? Are they employees or subcontractors and are they all insured?
9. Who cleans up after the job is finished?
10. Will we need any permits for this project? Who is going to obtain and pay for them?
11. Will you provide written guarantees on all materials and workmanship?
12. What happens if I change my mind?
13. What is the exact schedule of payments to be made? Besides materials and labour, does your estimate include sales tax, permit fees, structural analysis fees, and shipping costs?
14. How soon can you respond to a service call if my solar system is not working properly? Would you be the one to repair the system?
15. Who looks after completing the various grant application forms? Will you assist?

B. About the Contractor's Company:

1. What is your street address? (If provided with only a post office box number)
2. Is your company a full service or specialty firm?
3. How long have you been in business?
4. How is your firm organized?
5. How many projects like mine have you completed in the past year? In the past three years?
6. May I have a list of references for those projects?
7. Have you or your employees been trained to install solar systems and by whom (i.e. the manufacturer or an independent training agency)?
8. What percentage of your business is repeat or referral business?
9. Are you a member of a national trade association?

C. Summarizing Your Feelings about the Contractor:

1. Does the contractor appear to be knowledgeable?
2. Does the contractor appear to be someone who hears what your needs and wants are?
3. Does the contractor appear to have a genuine concern for your needs?
4. Can you communicate effectively with the contractor?

The above have been adopted from:

- *"Solar Water Heating Systems: a Buyer's Guide"*, published by Natural Resources Canada
- *"Solar PV Grant Program – Tips on Choosing a PV Installer"*, published by Sustainable Development Fund Solar Photovoltaic Grant Program.