

## Frequently Asked Questions

### PROGRAM QUALIFICATIONS

**Q:** Am I eligible to participate in the Solar Neighbourhoods Pilot Program?

**A:** Solar Neighbourhoods is currently at the pilot program stage and is only open to residents of Riverdale's Ward 30 (Councillor Paula Fletcher's ward). The program provides incentives for installations of qualified solar hot water systems on low-rise, single-family residential homes in Ward 30. See [www.solarnighbourhoods.ca](http://www.solarnighbourhoods.ca) for more details on eligibility.

**Q: I own a business in Ward 30, can I participate in the Solar Neighbourhoods program?**

**A:** No, the Solar Neighbourhoods program is only for low-rise, single-family residential buildings in Ward 30. Business owners are encouraged to participate in the Federal ecoENERGY program, which provides even larger financial incentives to install solar water heating systems on commercial and institutional buildings. See [www.oeec.nrcan.gc.ca/commercial/index.cfm?attr=0](http://www.oeec.nrcan.gc.ca/commercial/index.cfm?attr=0) for more information.

**Q: How can I participate if I don't own my home?**

**A:** If you are a renter living in a single-family residential home, talk to the owner about participating in Solar Neighbourhoods. Only the homeowner can install solar hot water systems and participate in the initiative. You can also participate in the Solar Neighbourhoods by helping spread the news about the Initiative in your community. Contact Solar Neighbourhoods if you are interested in helping with community marketing by emailing [solar@toronto.ca](mailto:solar@toronto.ca).

**Q: Does my home have to be totally unshaded to use a solar hot water system?**

**A:** To get optimum efficiency, there should be no shade on the panel between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on a summer day. Panels are roughly 4 x 8 feet (1.3 x 2.7 metres), so if you can find a south-facing spot on your roof that is unshaded between these hours (either a sloped roof face that has southern exposure or a flat roof where panels could be installed facing south) then your home may be suitable.

### INCENTIVES

**Q: Do the federal and provincial governments offer any financial incentives?**

**A:** In addition to the financial incentives provided through the Solar Neighbourhoods program there is also funding available for residential solar thermal installations from the Federal and Provincial governments. The federal government's ecoEnergy Retrofit – Homes program will provide a \$500 rebate for participants who undergo an EcoEnergy Assessment and install a solar thermal system, and the Ontario Ministry of Energy will provide a matching incentive of \$500. In total (including Solar Neighbourhood incentive), qualifying households could receive up to \$2000 in incentives for a solar thermal installation. The Province of Ontario also offers a provincial sales tax refund on all solar hot water systems.

**Q: I have already had an EcoENERGY assessment performed for my home. Can I still qualify for the Solar Neighbourhoods incentive?**

**A:** Yes, we will arrange a solar-readiness only assessment for homeowners who have already completed an ecoENERGY assessment. If your ecoENERGY assessment was more than 18 months ago, or you have already had your follow-up "E" assessment, you cannot claim the federal and provincial rebates, but you will receive the Solar Neighbourhoods incentive (\$1,000). However, by undertaking a second full EcoENERGY assessment you will qualify for the federal and provincial solar system rebates as well. These incentives total \$1,000, which will more than offset the approximately \$350 net cost of the assessment itself.

**Q: Does the Solar Neighbourhood incentive apply for systems that are used for space heating as well as water heating?**

A: No. The Solar Neighbourhood incentive is available for systems designed to heat domestic hot water only. The federal EcoENERGY program offers other incentives that may be applicable to such systems, including a 50% rebate (with provincial matching incentive) for commercial systems.

## FINANCING

**Q: How do I finance a solar water heating system?**

A: Under the Solar Neighbourhoods Loan Option, participants can opt to receive a \$500 cash grant (applied to the cost of the system and paid to the Contractor) and zero-interest financing on the remainder of the cost of the system rather than the straight \$1,000 cash incentive. The loan program is administered by Solar Neighbourhoods's lending partner, EnWise.

Homeowners may also choose to finance their SDHW system independently, for example, as part of a home mortgage or line of credit. In long-term loans of 20 years or more, the monthly solar savings will normally be greater than the monthly mortgage payments for the solar system.

**Q: If I opt for a zero-interest Solar Neighbourhoods loan, will the EcoENERGY rebate be deducted from the loan principle?**

A: No, the loan amount will be calculated based on the cost of the system less the Solar Neighbourhoods incentive (in this case, \$500). However, when you complete your follow-up EcoENERGY audit and receive your federal and provincial rebate cheque, you can immediately apply this to your loan principle if you wish.

**Q: Can I make payments on the loan principle at any time?**

A: Yes. You will be allowed to make payments on your principle whenever you wish, with no penalties.

**Q: What happens to the loan if I move?**

A: You will be required to pay off the principle remaining on the loan before closing the sale.

## SYSTEMS

**Q: Are solar water heating systems reliable?**

A: Properly designed and installed systems with glass-covered collectors should perform well for more than 20 years. Controllers, like other electronic devices, may require servicing during the life of the system, and the pump and hot water tank may have to be replaced after 10-15 years. Since conventional water heaters have the same expected lifetime, water tank replacement costs are not regarded as unique to solar energy systems.

Normal maintenance consists of checking pipe insulation, roof penetrations and collector mounting, pump operation and tank flushing. The latter is also recommended for conventional water heating systems.

Many installation firms provide yearly maintenance checkups of their solar systems similar to annual air-conditioning system maintenance programs. These can be beneficial in extending the life of the system and ensuring optimum performance.

It is important to request that the installer put an indicator on your solar system showing that the system is working. It can be as simple as a small light that comes on when the system is operating.

**Q: If I order a solar system, what do I get?**

A: Most packaged solar systems include everything you need: collectors, storage tank, controls and pump, roof flashings, valves and air vent. You or your installer will need to supply the copper pipe and insulation to connect the collectors to the heat exchanger on the storage tank.

## SYSTEM COSTS

### **Q: What costs can I expect?**

**A:** In order to participate in Solar Neighbourhoods, homeowners must undergo a special home EcoEnergy assessment, which will provide information on the house's current energy use, feedback on how the homeowner can improve household energy efficiency, and include a solar assessment to determine whether the house is suitable for solar hot water. The cost of an EcoEnergy audit is about \$500, but there is a Provincial rebate of \$150 available.

The solar system price quoted by the solar Contractor should include all system hardware and installation costs. System costs are expected to be anywhere from \$3,500 to \$8,500 depending on the size of the system (number of panels) and the complexity of the installation (roof height and accessibility, plumbing, etc.)

The cost of a building permit for SDHW systems is \$94, and should be included in the price of the system quoted by the Contractor.

While solar thermal is a very reliable technology, regular maintenance is recommended to ensure that your system is performing correctly. Ask your installer about scheduling yearly maintenance checks and their costs.

### **Q: Are solar hot water systems likely to come down in price in the next few years?**

**A:** The technology behind solar hot water systems is fairly simple (pipes and glass) and there are unlikely to be any major technological changes that will affect price in the foreseeable future. Increased sales of solar hot water systems may help to reduce system costs, but this, again, is unlikely to have a major impact in the next few years.

## PERMITS

### **Q: Do I need a building permit to install a solar hot water system?**

**A:** Yes, and all eligible Solar Neighbourhoods installers will be responsible for helping you to secure a building permit. The City of Toronto is working to streamline the process for issuing solar system building permits and has already instituted a policy of charging the lowest available fee (\$94) for such permits. Solar Neighbourhoods is working with the City to create standardized plans and drawings that will make the building permit process faster and simpler. A building permit is your guarantee that your system is being installed properly, is safe and that it will not cause any structural damage to your home.

### **Q: Could I have problems with height restrictions?**

**A:** Toronto Buildings has recently announced that solar domestic hot water (SDHW) systems are officially exempt from the measurement of building height. There are some conditions on this though. If your SDHW system will extend higher than the zoned height limit, than:

- it cannot be more than 5.0m higher than the height limit for the zone;
- it cannot cover more than 30% of the roof area; and,
- it cannot be located on the side of the roof that is facing a street.

### **Q: Will a solar hot water system make my home more valuable? What will that mean for my property taxes?**

**A:** For buyers interested in an energy-efficient home, one equipped with a solar hot water system may be more attractive, but we simply don't have enough experience with solar-equipped homes to really measure the impact on resale prices. The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) has informed Solar Neighbourhoods that they currently do not factor in the presence of a solar energy system when calculating a home's market value for taxation purposes. So adding a solar system will not affect your current property taxes.

If you have any more questions, please contact us:

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