



Avoiding Shady Solar Practices

A Homeowner's Guide

The number of solar panels installed in the U.S. is expected to [quadruple over the next ten years](#). As solar has emerged as a profitable alternative to fossil fuels, it has seen the rise of some questionable business practices. In pursuit of profits, some solar companies prioritize their own interests over those of their customers.

ReVision Energy has been in the solar industry for over twenty years, and we know transparency is key. All solar companies, including ReVision, have a financial stake in the industry's growth. However, the long-term success of clean energy – and the long-term success of the planet! – depends on prioritizing people above profit. Solar scams and aggressive sales tactics will only hurt the industry – and the planet! – in the long run.



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AN EMPLOYEE-OWNED SOLAR COMPANY | SERVING ME, MA, AND NH

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There's a LOT of information out there, and we know it can be overwhelming. We've organized key points for you in this guide. Look for these flags throughout the guide:



RED FLAGS

These mean you should be very cautious or even walk away – these point to shady practices, solar scams, or serious issues that could end up costing you.



YELLOW FLAGS

Proceed carefully – these aren't necessarily deal-breakers, but you should be aware of these pros and cons before making a decision.



GREEN FLAGS

Green is great! These mean the company is trustworthy and reliable.

Watch Out! Common Solar Scams

AGGRESSIVE DOOR KNOCKING

Some solar companies use aggressive door-to-door tactics that can push homeowners to hasty decisions.

As a consumer, it can be frustrating and confusing

when a representative in your house pushes you to sign a contract because their company is “only offering a special deal in your neighborhood for the next few days.” **At first glance, the deal may look good, but take the time to dig into the details.** These high-pressure situations can result in homeowners signing contracts with hidden terms.

Some solar companies package solar leases into asset-backed securities to sell to investors. This investor-owned business structure creates immediate profits and facilitates fast growth, but puts pressure on salespeople to sell more, quickly. This can lead to unethical sales behaviors and misleading advertising, as investor profit and sales targets overshadow customer service and integrity.

Salespeople sometimes misrepresent the company they work for, make unrealistic savings or energy production promises, or offer “free” systems with undisclosed hidden costs. Later in this guide, we'll cover what to look out for in a solar quote.



AGGRESSIVE DOOR-KNOCKING SALES TACTICS MAY LOOK LIKE:

-  Insistence on same-day decisions
-  Use of scare tactics about rising energy costs
-  Claims that their offer is "exclusive" or time-limited
-  Refusal to leave materials for you to review

If you feel pressured, say no and close the door. Solar is a long-term investment, and trustworthy companies will respect your need for time and information.

Additionally, remember that you have legal protection. The FTC's "Cooling-Off Rule" **gives you three days to cancel signed contracts.** Just tell the salesperson you know you're entitled to the cooling-off period. And know that any contract you sign in your home must legally include:

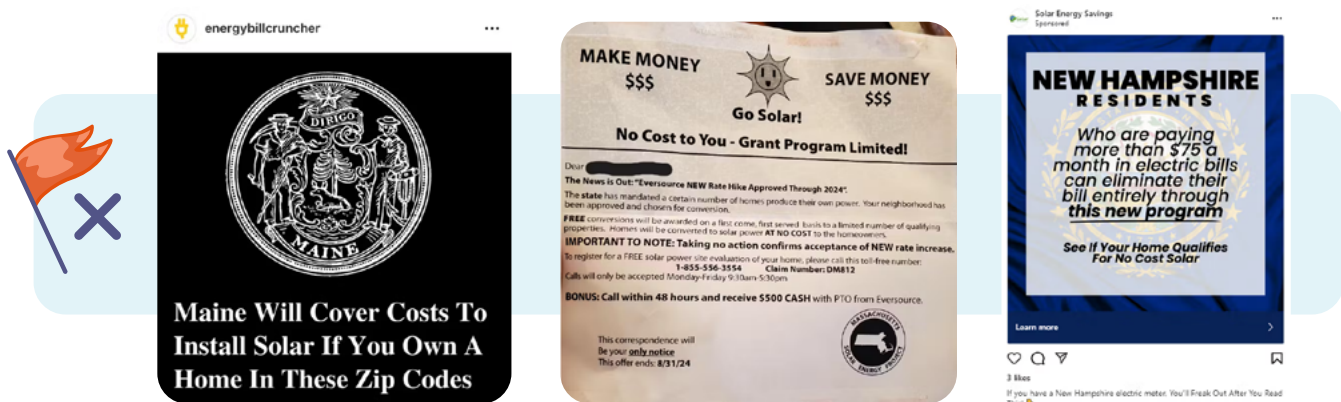
-  A "Notice of Cancellation" with all the blanks filled in
-  Seller's address
-  Terms of payment clearly stated
-  Correct date of sale

If any of this information is missing, you can cancel the contract.

MISLEADING ADVERTISEMENTS

Think you've seen an ad that's too good to be true? It likely is. Watch out for:

-  Claims of "free" solar (often hiding long-term commitments or escalating payments)
-  Promises of unrealistic savings or payback periods
-  Vague references to "government programs" without specifics
-  Claims that a state will pay for you to go solar
-  Use of official-looking seals or logos to imply government affiliation



If you suspect a solar scam, report it to your state's attorney general, consumer protection office, or [the FTC](#).

Researching Solar Companies

DO SOME DIGGING

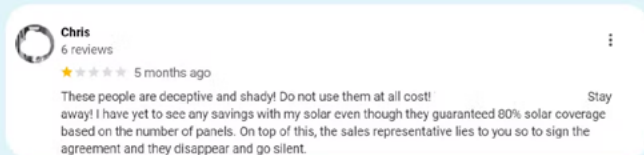
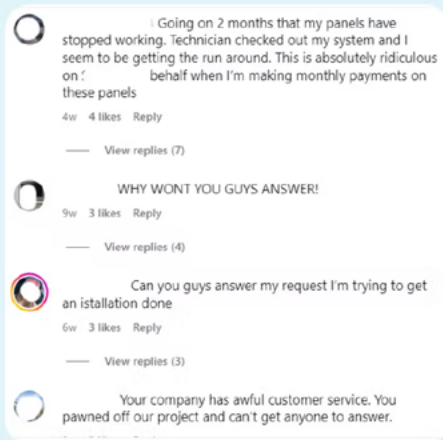
Figure out whether a company values you – or just your business. Taking the time to ask the right questions is your shield against solar scams and disappointment. A solar array has an expected lifespan of over 25 years, so this is a long-term commitment. A reputable installer will never rush you or force you to make snap decisions. So ask away!

COMPANY BACKGROUND & EXPERIENCE

A company's background, experience, and reviews can tell you a lot. Finding this information online is an easy way to compare solar companies.



Red Flag: They can't provide references or have a history of customer complaints.



Yellow Flag: They're a relatively new company with limited experience in your area or with your type of installation. Watch out for short, generic "five star" reviews that may not be authentic.



Green Flag: They have a long-standing presence in the industry. They have positive, honest customer reviews, and a track record of successful installations.

If a solar company has been around for a long time, with happy customers spanning decades – that's a good sign! With experience comes strong relationships with suppliers, meaning they can get better equipment (inverters, solar panels, racking, wiring, etc.) at lower prices.

Years of installing leads to improved processes, smoother installations, and fewer surprises. Experienced companies are better equipped to handle complex projects and troubleshoot issues. Since solar is a long-term investment, choosing a company with a proven track record means they'll likely be around to honor warranties and provide support for years to come.

Online reviews also say a lot about a company. A recent [NPR article](#) about solar fraud advises people to look for reviews mentioning specific stories or resolved issues. Some solar companies flood sites with fake 5-star reviews. Check out [our latest reviews](#), or our [awards and recognition page](#) if you want to learn more about ReVision's track record in the industry.

ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- Can I speak directly with some of your past customers in my area?
- How long has your company been in business?
- What certifications and licenses does your company have?

SOLAR TIMELINE

Understanding the steps and timeline for your project helps you plan and know what to expect. Check out ReVision's [Steps to Solar](#) guide to learn more about our process.



Red Flag: They pressure you to sign a contract before anyone visits your home, and do not offer in-person site visits.

Red Flag: They rely exclusively on satellite imagery of your home and don't offer an "escape clause" to the contract.



Yellow Flag: They give you a vague timeline or can't clearly outline the steps in the process.



Green Flag: They physically measure your roof and walk you through the installation process in detail, including any possible challenges and how they'll handle them.



ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- What is your process and timeline for the installation?
- Are you familiar with the permitting requirements in my town?
- Have you installed projects in my town? How many?
- Are you familiar with my utility's interconnection process?

Comparing Solar Quotes

After you've assessed the companies, it's time to compare solar quotes. All quotes should include information about the proposed system, its components, & associated costs. Look for:

- ✓ System size and estimated annual production
- ✓ Equipment specifications (including panels, inverters, racking)
- ✓ Total cost
- ✓ Estimated savings, payback period, and environmental impact
- ✓ Available incentives and rebates
- ✓ Warranty information
- ✓ Financing options

If you're looking at a solar quote for the first time, we are happy to review contract terms, designs, production estimates, pricing, and anything else. We want to make sure you have all of the information needed to make a good investment . . . even if it is not with ReVision Energy.

COST AND FINANCING



Red Flag: They only offer one financing option, and don't clearly explain the details of the financing. There are different ways to pay for your solar installation, so be cautious if a company pushes one financing option without alternatives.

Red Flag: They promise you'll never get a utility bill again. This is wrong! If you have a grid-tied solar system, you will still get a monthly bill from your electric provider to pay for the grid connection. This connection fee can be anywhere from \$8 - \$25 per month depending on your location. So even if you're offsetting 100% of your energy consumption with solar, you will still be charged a small monthly customer fee.



Yellow Flag: They guarantee your home value will skyrocket. While solar can increase home value, every home is different, and installation quality has impact. A poorly installed, jumbled array from a company that has gone out of business may not increase home value.

Yellow Flag: The cost of installation on your quote is "preliminary pricing." This fine print often means the installation company can add on fees for permits, interconnection, and engineering later, dramatically increasing your overall cost.



Green Flag: They clearly display multiple financing options, show Return-On-Investment charts for any option you'd like, and are willing to discuss each one with you to highlight pros and cons.



REVISION ENERGY PROVIDES A [VARIETY OF PAYMENT OPTIONS](#):

✓ **Cash Payment**

Paying upfront with cash is simple and offers the best return on investment. Usually, you'll pay one-third of the cost when you sign the contract, and the rest when the equipment is delivered and installed.

✓ **Solar Loans**

ReVision works with lenders like Clean Energy Credit Union and EastRise Credit Union to offer solar loans with terms from 5 to 20 years. Many of these loans start with a 12 to 18-month interest-only period, so your payments are low at first, giving you time to apply federal tax credits before full payments kick in. The monthly loan payments are usually equal to or less than your current electric bill, and there are no penalties for paying off the loan early.

✓ **A Safe Solar Lease**

Our solar lease is different from many of the ones offered by predatory companies. Traditional solar leases often have high annual escalators, unclear owners, dubious sales pitches, and disappearing installers. Our lease is the opposite of all of that because it was designed for the customer, not the company.

- **0% Payment Escalator:** Your monthly payment stays flat for the entire lease.
- **Hands-Off Experience:** Monitoring, maintenance, and system performance are managed for you.
- **Built-In Protection:** Our design team maximizes customer security to keep every leased system we install running smoothly.

✓ **Home Equity Line of Credit (HELOC)**

You can use a HELOC or home equity loan to fund your solar project. This option often comes with better interest rates compared to other loans.

✓ **Other Financing Options**

You can also explore other financing sources like personal loans, construction loans, cash-out refinancing, or even borrowing from retirement funds. If you go with your own lender, we treat it like a cash purchase and follow the same payment schedule.

You can mix and match the above options, combining cash with a loan if that works best for your situation. If a salesperson provides you with a quote that finances your system, **be sure to understand any terms like dealer fees or rate escalators.**

What are Rate Escalators?

A rate escalator is a feature in some solar financing deals where your monthly payment goes up by a set percentage each year. When your contract has a rate escalator, your payments start off low but gradually increase.

For example, if your first payment is \$100 and there's a 3% rate escalator, your payment would go up to \$103 the next year, \$106.09 the year after that, and so on. Over time, these increases add up, making your payments much higher than you initially expected. Sometimes a contract may only show the monthly financing payments for the first year, which don't factor in the annual rate escalator.

Our lease, on the other hand, has a 0% escalator. If you're paying \$100 that first month, you'll be paying \$100 in 25 years.

What are Dealer Fees?

A dealer fee is an additional cost in some solar financing. It is often hidden in the total loan amount to make the deal appear more attractive. Because the fees are not usually disclosed separately, you may not realize that a significant portion of your monthly payment is going toward these hidden costs, leading to a situation where the total amount paid over the life of the loan is much higher than expected.

ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- How can I pay for my system?
- Will I still get a bill from the utility?
- Can you break down all costs in the quote, including any fees associated with financing?

ENERGY & FINANCIAL SAVINGS ESTIMATES

Solar savings will vary by project.



Red Flag: They make promises of energy savings or financial savings that seem too good to be true. Be cautious if a salesperson is exaggerating the numbers to make their offer more appealing. This can happen if they:

- Use overly optimistic solar site data to inflate production estimates
- Ignore the impact of shading on your roof
- Assume unrealistically high panel efficiency



Yellow Flag: They give you savings and energy production estimates without clearly explaining how they arrived at those numbers.



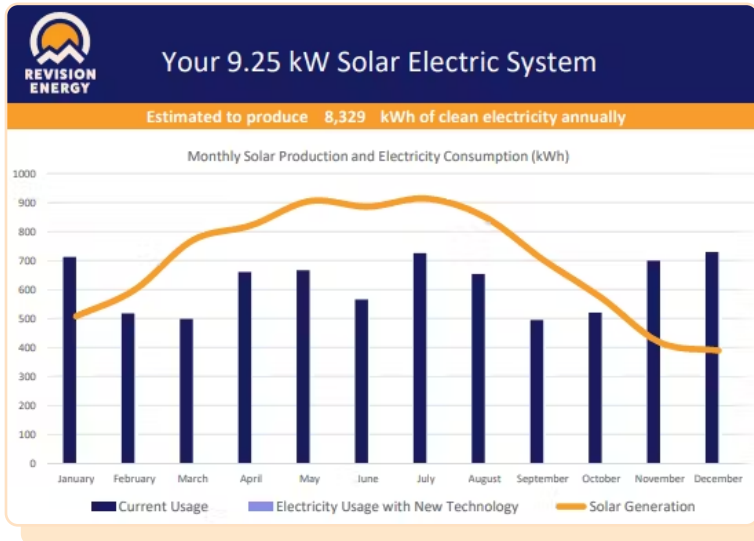
Green Flag: They offer conservative estimates tailored to your specific situation, using historical data, and take the time to clearly explain all the calculations behind those estimates.

We provide realistic estimates of your potential savings and the time it will take to recoup your investment based on:

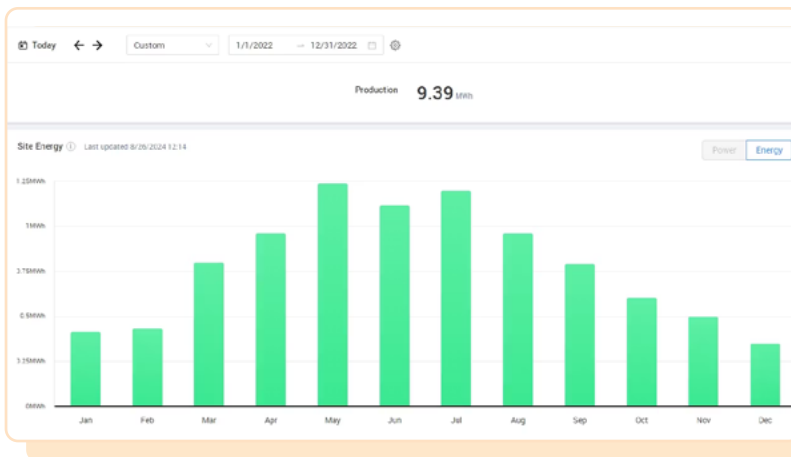
- ✓ Your specific energy consumption
- ✓ Local conditions, including shade and sun-hours
- ✓ System size, orientation, and tilt
- ✓ All incentives, including tax credits and rebates
- ✓ Historic annual utility rate increase data

Our [solar calculator](#) gives you a rough estimate, and our team can provide detailed projections. Be sure to ask each solar company specific questions about how they calculate these numbers to ensure you're getting accurate information.

We've been doing this for 20+ years and we pride ourselves on the accuracy of our proposals. But don't just take our word for it – **check out this system proposal from 2021 matched with its actual production after one year:**



We estimated an annual energy production of 8.32 MWh for this system



In its first year, the system actually produced a total of 9.39 MWh!

Want to chat with a current customer in your area about their proposal's accuracy? We can arrange that too.

ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- How can I pay for my system?
- Will I still get a bill from the utility?
- Can you break down all costs in the quote, including any fees associated with financing?

TYPES OF SOLAR PANELS AND EQUIPMENT



Red Flag: They can't or won't give you clear details about the equipment they use. This might mean they're using low-quality gear or don't actually have what they're offering.



Yellow Flag: They are unable to give you details or provide the manufacturer warranty documents for the equipment in your quote.



Green Flag: They're upfront about the equipment they use and work with well-known manufacturers that offer strong manufacturer warranties.



Understanding the brands and solar panels referenced in your quotes is important because you can compare manufacturer warranties, reliability, and performance. By learning about the different solar panel specifications, you can make a more informed decision that aligns with your energy goals, budget, and home preferences. Your system's designer should be able to explain the components and specifications of the quoted solar project in simple terms. Asking about these details will help you get a sense of their technical knowledge. Do they really understand the product they're selling?

While price is certainly important, cheaper costs in the short term can harm you in the long term. There are several other factors to consider when it comes to a solar investment:

-  Quality of equipment and installation workmanship
-  Comprehensiveness of warranties (both for manufacturer and workmanship)
-  Clarity of the installation process
-  Variety and transparency of financing options
-  Company experience and reputation

Want to learn more? Check out ReVision's guide on [how to compare solar panels](#).

ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- What make and model of solar panels is used in my quote?
- What make and model of inverter is used in my quote?
- How did you determine this would be the best solar design for my home?

Servicing Your Solar Panels

While residential solar electric systems are generally low maintenance, they are still an electronic technology! Like many electronics, issues can pop up, either from the system itself or from external forces (like a tree branch in a winter storm). Prioritizing support and maintenance when choosing a solar provider can save you headaches and money in the long run.



Red Flag: They provide solar warranties with minimal protection for the system and don't have clear information on how claims are handled.

Red Flag: They tell you the system won't need any service.



Yellow Flag: They're vague about what is and isn't covered by the warranty, and who exactly will service the system if any issues arise.



Green Flag: They have a dedicated in-house service team, comprehensive workmanship and manufacturer warranties, and they can explain all conditions in simple terms.

It's important to note that there aren't nationwide standards for what a solar warranty should cover, so one company's workmanship warranty might be very different from another's.

A company might offer a 30-year warranty through a third-party provider, which sounds great at first. But if you look closer, you might find that this warranty doesn't cover electrical wiring or general electrical workmanship. Given that the goal of your solar installation is to produce electricity for your home, the quality of electrical work is pretty important! Under that 30-year warranty, you could be left paying for those repairs out of pocket, so it is really important to understand exactly what your warranty covers.



It's also important to know who will be servicing your system if it breaks. If the company who installed the system has a full-scale, dedicated service team for support, they'll be the ones coming to fix your system. However, most solar companies don't have a dedicated service team.

Some reputable solar companies use third-party warranty services simply because they don't have the capacity to do their service in-house. That can be fine and is not automatically a red flag. Just be aware that this means you're adding another layer of complexity. Now you will need to assess both the installer you are choosing AND the service company, with whom you'll be working for the next 25+ years.

The installer and third-party company might not know exactly who will show up to fix the system if there's an issue. In fact, we often get calls from third-party warranty providers asking us to service the systems they are under contract to cover.

"I contacted [the company that installed my system] and they had me do a system reset by powering off and back on, but the issue persists. They said I need to have a service call, but I'm on my own to find someone to do it."

— A NON-REVISION CUSTOMER

TO SUM IT UP

Warranties matter, and so does having someone to service those warranties. More information about the ReVision's service team and our warranties can be found on our [website](#).



ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- What happens if my system breaks?
- What happens if I need to fix or replace my roof?
- What warranties do you provide on equipment and installation work?
- Do you cover your workmanship warranty or outsource it to a third-party company?
- Who provides the service for manufacturer's warranties?
- Are there any conditions or actions that could void the manufacturer's warranty?

Takeaways

You're almost there! Before you commit, here are a few last things to keep in mind:

➔ **READ THE CONTRACT CAREFULLY! IF ANYTHING'S UNCLEAR, DON'T HESITATE TO ASK QUESTIONS.**

- Get everything in writing.
- Know the contract cancellation terms.
- Make sure you understand your rights and any fees if you decide to cancel.
- Confirm the expected installation date and confirm what happens if there are delays.
- Ensure the equipment components, system size, and layout match your expectations.
- Understand payment due dates and installation milestones.
- Verify the necessary permits and approvals.

➔ **MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND THE SERVICE AND SUPPORT YOU'LL GET AFTER YOUR SYSTEM IS UP AND RUNNING.**

- Know who will be servicing your system.
- Understand how the warranty will transfer if you decide to sell your home.
- Make sure you understand what system monitoring is included and how long it lasts.
- Understand the terms of any performance guarantees.

➔ **AND MOST IMPORTANTLY...**



REVISION HAS GOT YOUR BACK!

If something doesn't feel right, you can get a second opinion from us, even if you're looking at another company. ReVision is a 100% employee-owned Certified B Corp, with a mission to make life better by building a just and equitable electric future. We want you to go solar, even if it's not with us. So, we're always available to answer your questions: give us a call or shoot us an email at hello@revisionenergy.com