ILLINOIS SHINES

Supporting Solar Development in Illinois

Illinois Shines and the Adjustable Block Program are administered by Energy Solutions on behalf of the Illinois Power Agency, an independent state government agency.

What is Illinois Shines?[1]

Illinois Shines is the brand name of the **Adjustable Block Program**, a state-administered program for new solar photovoltaic ("PV") systems. The program provides payments in exchange for 15 years of Renewable Energy Credits ("RECs") generated by new PV systems. These payments, made by Illinois utilities, vary depending on the system's size and where it is located. Participating in Illinois Shines is the same thing as participating in the Adjustable Block Program.

What are RECs and why are they valuable?

RECs represent the *environmental value* of the electricity generated from solar panels, but not the electricity itself. Whoever owns the RECs has the right to say they used that solar power. Utilities must purchase RECs to meet their obligation to supply a certain amount of power from renewable energy. RECs can also be valuable to businesses seeking to be able to say that they use solar power.

A home PV system might generate 50-200 RECs over 15 years. By participating in Illinois Shines, you will transfer the RECs from your PV system to an Illinois electric utility. Selling your RECs will not affect your PV system's production.

For more information on RECs, see a video at *vimeo.com/113250210*.

Do you have to allow your RECs to be sold in order to go solar?

Although you can keep your RECs or sell them to someone besides utilities, participating in Illinois Shines and thus allowing your RECs to be sold to a utility is likely to be your best financial option. Selling your RECs through this program will make it more likely that your PV system will save you money.

Photo: Thinkstockphotos/elenathewise

What information will you receive before you sign an installation contract?

Your contractor is required to provide you with an Illinois Shines Standard Disclosure Form. It includes contact information for everyone who has a part in your solar contract, information about the installation process, and an estimate of your system's costs and how much money you may save. Review this form carefully.

What are the financing and ownership options when installing solar?

The most common options are 1) buying the system, 2) leasing the system, or 3) signing a Power Purchase Agreement ("PPA"). If you lease or sign a PPA, you don't own the system, but you get many of the benefits. For more information, see *www.cesa.org/resource-library/resource/a-homeowners-guide-to-solar-financing-leases-loans-and-ppas*.

When deciding on the best option for you, consider:

- If you're buying the system, how much will it cost? Will you take out a loan to pay for it? How do the loan payments compare to projected reductions in your monthly electric bill?
- If you're leasing, how much is your monthly lease payment? How does that compare to projected reductions in your monthly electric bill? Do you have to put money down at the start?
- If you're signing a PPA, how much is the per kilowatt hour price for the energy produced? How does that compare to your current electricity rate? Do you have to put money down at the start?
- Does your lease or PPA include an escalation clause that increases the amount of payments over time? If so, by how much do payments increase?

Going solar is a major decision, so exercise the same caution you would when making other major consumer decisions. It is good to get quotes from at least three contractors and to check references. Also, make sure to read and understand the entire contract before signing it.

If you get solar panels, are you guaranteed to save money?

You are not guaranteed to save money unless your contract includes an explicit guarantee. The questions below will affect whether you save money.[2] You can answer some questions yourself, while others can be answered by your installer or sales agent.

- **What per kilowatt-hour rate are you currently paying for electricity?**
  The higher the electricity rate before you go solar, the more money you can potentially save.
- **Is your roof good for solar?**
  The direction your roof faces and how much shade it gets will affect how much electricity roof-mounted PV will generate. The roof's condition should also be considered.
- **How much electricity will the system generate?**
  If your system produces more electricity than you use over an annual period, you may not receive credit for all the electricity generated.
- **How much money will you receive for RECs?**
  The Approved Vendor will be paid by a utility for your system's RECs and may use some of that money to reduce your cost of going solar.
- **Can you use the federal Investment Tax Credit?**
  If you buy your system, you may qualify for a substantial federal income tax credit. Consult your tax adviser.
- **How long do you expect to stay in your home or business location?**
  If you lease or sign a PPA, you may be required to buy out the contract if you move. Read your contract to find out what happens if you move.

What is net metering and how do you enroll?

Net metering measures the electricity your PV system produces and credits you for it on your electric bill. If you buy electricity from your utility (e.g., basic service or hourly pricing), you must contact the utility to enroll in net metering. If you buy electricity from a Retail Electric Supplier (e.g., through municipal aggregation or an individual contract), you must contact the supplier to enroll in net metering. If you later change your electricity supplier, you will need to re-enroll in net metering with your new supplier. Failure to enroll or re-enroll may significantly impact the value you receive from your PV system.

Photo: Elevate Energy

Consumer rights

For your PV system to participate in Illinois Shines, an Approved Vendor will submit your PV system for application to the program. (The Approved Vendor will be identified on the Standard Disclosure Form you receive.) If the application is approved and after the system starts operating, the Approved Vendor will receive payments for the first 15 years of your system's RECs. **You have a right to request information** about your system's application status and how much a utility is paying for its RECs. Some of that information will be on the Standard Disclosure Form. The Approved Vendor must respond to issues related to ensuring that your PV system is generating electricity and producing RECs. Only companies that are Approved Vendors can submit your system to participate in the program.

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Complaint procedures

If you have a problem related to your PV system or the sales process, **first try to resolve it with your installer or the Approved Vendor**. If you can't agree about how to solve the problem, **you may contact the Illinois Shines/Adjustable Block Program Administrator** by emailing *admin@illinoisshines.com* or by calling 877-783-1820.

If you have been subject to fraudulent or deceptive sales practices, the Illinois Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division may be able to help. Customers can contact it at:

Chicago
800-386-5438 | TTY: 800-964-3013

Springfield
800-243-0618 | TTY: 877-844-5461

Carbondale
800-243-0607 | TTY: 877-675-9339

Spanish Language
866-310-8398

For more information, go to www.illinoisshines.com

For income-eligible households, the Illinois Solar For All program may be an option. Learn more at IllinoisSFA.com.

1 This brochure is designed primarily for customers of Ameren Illinois Company, Commonwealth Edison Company, and MidAmerican Energy Company. For consumers in electric cooperative, municipal utility, or Mt. Carmel Public Utility territories, some policies—such as net metering—may vary. Contact those utilities for details.

2 Commercial and multi-family residential buildings may be eligible for a rebate for a smart inverter. See *https://illinoissolar.org/blog/6172611*; also see *www.comed.com/SmartEnergy/InnovationTechnology/Pages/DGRebate.aspx* and *www.ameren.com/illinois/electric-choice/renewables/distributed-generation*.