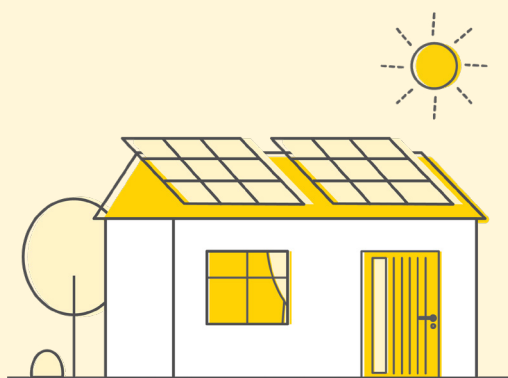


Top tips for solar



Solar electricity is a positive option that can help you reduce your long-term spend on electricity and exercise greater control over your electricity usage.

Consumers are increasingly deciding to combine the installations of solar panels with a battery as the economic benefits are far greater than solar on its own.

Utilities Disputes is one of the only independent organisations that works with solar retailers and customers to get their issues sorted. This unique role provides us with valuable insights into some of the problems that can arise and the steps you can take to avoid them.

We've set out our ten top tips to help you make the right decision for you on solar. The guidance is in three parts:

- A** [Starting to think about solar?](#)
- B** [Signing up for solar](#)
- C** [After signing up for solar](#)



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A. Starting to think about solar?

Before you make any big decisions about installing solar, it is important to do your homework to understand what a solar system will provide you, and what's the right option for you.

1

Read the free EECA guidance and check out what some of the trusted organisations have to say

- The Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority's (EECA) website can help you decide whether solar is right for your home.
- You can do the same through Sustainable Energy Association New Zealand's (SEANZ) website as well as accessing lists of SEANZ authorised installers.

2

Review your current electricity pricing plan

To work out if solar is right for you, start by getting a good understanding of your current electricity plan and usage so you can understand what you need to consider.

- How much electricity will you need?
- Are you on the best available plan for your needs?

Better plans may be available, so it pays to check what impact that could have on your monthly bills through comparison websites like Billy and Powerswitch.

To compare with a solar plan, there are different offerings available particularly if your system may include a battery.

A system and battery managed through a smart phone app can optimise the benefits you get by controlling your electricity usage across peak and off-peak periods.

It can also manage your backup electricity needs (utilising the system as a virtual power plant) when the electricity network is down.



Is your roof ready for solar installation?

Rooftop solar panels can be expensive to install and move.

Ideally your roof should be in good condition, unshaded, and well angled for sun. Ask if this is the case and what impact the installation may have on any existing roof warranty.

The roof pitch, roof angle and design of the installation can have a bearing on savings and returns calculations – these are topics you can discuss with the company you select for the install.

You may want to discuss fitting panels with the installer as there are different ways of installing the solar panels.

You can also check out [Standards New Zealand – SNZ PAS 6014:2025](#) which is used by EECA to provide good practical advice, information and guidance on solar photovoltaic (PV) and battery storage.

Take photos before installation so there is a record before any installation is underway.



Is your electricity meter compatible?

Some solar providers require a specific metering configuration.

This can sometimes limit the choice you have in terms of retailers' plans – such as those that take control of your hot water usage when network demand is high. Confirm whether this will be an issue and whether it's an industry requirement or specific to that solar provider.

You can also ask an electrician or other professional about what impact this may have on your household electricity usage and whether it will be an issue in the long run.

Also be prepared for a short wait for an import/export meter to be installed, and you start receiving the benefits of exporting excess electricity back into the electricity network.

B. Signing up for solar

If you decide on a solar setup to best suit your household electricity needs; you should:

- ✓ Check the specifics of any offers you have received, including the guarantees
- ✓ Know exactly what you are signing up for
- ✓ Know what your responsibilities are in the short to long term, including what you need to do if you want to move or remove the panels.



Check the assumptions made in the offer about savings and promised returns

Will these be affected by changing retailers or changes to your plan or the overall price of electricity?

In many cases projected savings depend on whether you stay with a particular retailer or remain on a specific plan. There may also be built-in increases linked to the overall price of electricity. You should:

- Ask whether this is the case, and what it means if you switch retailer or pricing plan.
- Check what assumptions have been made on the value of exporting electricity back into the network and how that will be paid by the retailer, particularly over time. Your export rate will have a bearing on the return you get on your investment.
- Also check what assumptions have been made regarding electricity price inflation - recognising that annual inflation over the past 15 years has been 3-4%.

6 For subscription agreements, find out what the termination costs will be

There are a number of different models for retailing solar. A popular one involves the purchase of solar electricity through a long-term subscription agreement where the cost of installation and ownership of the equipment is met by the retailer. If you go for this option, you should ask for the costs of termination if you change your mind.

It is also important to understand what will happen if you encounter financial difficulties or have issues with the installation or equipment.

You should also ask:

- If you terminate the agreement, what costs are you liable for to remove equipment and cancel the agreement?
- What happens if you sell the property?
- Who is responsible for maintaining the equipment?

These costs can run into many thousands of dollars so ask about them in advance. They should also be set out in clear, plain language in the contract before you commit.

If you are unsure of these responsibilities and costs, you should consider getting independent advice. This could include advice from your conveyancer or property lawyer if you are selling or purchasing a home where there is an existing solar subscription contract.

7 Check what is being offered and that it suits your needs

Make sure the solar system is the correct size for your current use and your future use. The best way to maximise the financial benefits of solar is to maximise your own consumption of the electricity you generate.

If you have a battery, you can further reduce your electricity costs by using stored solar energy during peak-price periods, particularly if you are on a time-of-use electricity plan.

Relying solely on a retailer's buy-back rates to calculate your return on investment is not advisable. Retailer energy rates and export tariffs change frequently, meaning a high buy-back rate today could be different in a few months.

Instead, focus on how many kWh you can realistically consume yourself with your own solar system. Base your sizing decisions on matching your household's daily energy patterns, rather than trying to build an oversized system to sell power back to the grid. These are questions you can ask your solar provider.

It is also important to understand the ownership of the system - who do the panels, inverter and/or battery belong to? And who has rights to use the battery storage energy?

8

Contact your current or intended retailer as soon as you make your decision to get solar

Do not wait until the installation is locked in or finished before talking to your retailer. It helps to provide early notice to your retailer and confirm the specific size and capacity of your proposed system to find out exactly what your new rates will be. This will allow them to pass on any relevant information to the local network company.

Contacting your electricity retailer early is vital because it is quite common that solar export rates vary based on system size. Installing a large solar system can sometimes push your connection into a different network pricing bracket, meaning your export or buy-back rates might be significantly lower than what you or your installer originally thought. It is essential to ask your retailer what your specific rates will be with your intended system size before you sign anything.

Doing this early also allows the retailer to check if your existing meter can be remotely reconfigured for solar or if a physical replacement is required, preventing long delays later. For example if your meter requires a physical change, this can happen before the install and then it only needs to be remotely reconfigured once the solar is installed.

It's also important to check your retailer's terms and conditions especially around solar, they may have certain rules which may affect your buy-back rates, the amount you can export, or they may not even support solar 'customers'.

C. After signing up for solar

Once you have your set up installed and ready to go, it is important to keep in mind your ongoing obligations and how you can maximise the benefits you gain.

9 Understand export versus self-consumption

The electricity you export to the grid earns a different return from electricity you use in the home. Battery configuration and household usage patterns make a real difference to your bill. If your system includes a battery and you are on a time-of-use pricing plan, managing when your hot water cylinder heats can provide additional savings.

10 Keep relevant records and know your responsibilities

- Hold on to receipts, communications, and warranty documents. It is not unusual for batteries to be guaranteed for up to ten years and solar panels for up to 25 years. You may need these documents for warranty claims. Typically, these documents and information should be provided or accessible after final commissioning but may be held and managed by the subscription provider.
- Ask the provider about their contractual responsibilities for ongoing maintenance after the system is installed, and what obligations there will be on you. For example, inverter settings must not be changed after installation. They include specific safety and operational features approved by the network operator at the time of connection.
- Ensure your switchboard labelling is kept up to date, if any labels fall off, it is important that these are replaced ASAP as this is a critical safety element for any future electrical work.
- Panels require regular, but gentle cleaning to maintain efficiency, so ensure they are mounted with safe access in mind.

We're here to help

Utilities Disputes can assist with issues and complaints against solar electricity retailers and distributors.

Check out our [website](#) for details and check our register of [member companies](#) you can complain about. If your issue is with a non-member, you can still get in touch to discuss what options you may have.

Utilities Disputes has been sorting complaints since 2001. We resolve disputes for electricity, gas, telecommunications, and water complaints. We also resolve disputes about access to shared property for fibre installations. We are free to consumers, independent and effective.

Utilities Disputes works with many different stakeholders in the Solar Energy space. We are grateful for feedback received on this guidance for consumers.

Contact Utilities Disputes

You can contact us on 0800 22 33 40, email us at info@udl.co.nz or visit our website and [make a complaint online](#). You can also contact a member of our team directly through Live Chat at the bottom-right of our [website](#) during business hours.



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