

SOLAR CONSUMER PROTECTION GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE



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PRESS RELEASE

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STATE AND COUNTY AGENCIES JOIN TO ADVISE FRESNO AREA UTILITY CUSTOMERS OF STEPS TO AVOID FRAUD WHEN GOING SOLAR

FRESNO, SEPTEMBER 19, 2019 – This week, approximately 300,000 electric utility customers in Fresno County are receiving a bulletin in the mail with specific steps to take before installing a solar photovoltaic system on their home.

The bulletin comes from the Solar Consumer Protection Government Taskforce, made up of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), Contractors State License Board (CSLB), Department of Business Oversight (DBO), and the Fresno County District Attorney's Office (Fresno DA). The agencies have been working together to address fraudulent activity in the solar industry and ensure customers are aware of resources available to them before going solar.

Although most solar system installations are done professionally and with no problems, the bulletin is being sent as a result of an uptick of fraudulent behavior in Fresno County, specifically scams targeting Spanish-speaking immigrant households in small communities, including Parlier and Huron. The Taskforce hopes the bulletin, which is in both English and Spanish, will help educate utility customers and make sure they know they can report solar fraud. The bulletin is also available online at www.cslb.ca.gov/solar.

The bulletin outlines eight tips utility customers should consider before going solar. They are:

- 1) Ask Questions and Don't Rush
- 2) Know How Much Power You Use

- 3) Check the License of the Solar Contractor
- 4) Know Your Options – Get Competing Bids
- 5) Understand Solar Financing – Solar is Not Free
- 6) Get Everything in Writing
- 7) Review the Contract Closely
- 8) Canceling a Contract – You Have 3 Days

The CPUC has adopted several consumer protections targeted to solar customers, including the development of a California Solar Consumer Protection Guide. Beginning September 30, 2019, it will be a required step of the solar sales process to have the guide signed by the consumer. The Guide is available at www.cpuc.ca.gov/solarguide.

“Going solar and being part of our clean energy future should make Californians better off, not expose them to fraud,” said CPUC Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves. “Solar customers deserve to know what they are getting and how much they can expect to save.”

“While we applaud California homeowners who want to go green, there are a lot of questions they should ask before deciding to go solar,” said CSLB Registrar David Fogt. “That’s why it’s critically important that homeowners have the information they need and know their rights before putting solar panels on their roof.”

“We remain committed to protecting the rights of consumers from fraudulent business practices through the prosecution of companies that violate consumer protection laws,” stated Jerry Stanley, Chief Deputy District Attorney for the Fresno County District Attorney’s Office, Consumer Protection Unit.

“Coordinating with state agencies, community groups, and industry representatives to provide consumers with the information they need to make sound decisions is just another way we seek to achieve that goal.”

The agencies have been working with community organizations to reach customers that may have experienced solar fraud. “As a community organizer, I feel we need to inform all our rural towns and communities that these state agencies are here to help us prevent being a victim of ‘BAD’ unethical companies not following the rules,” said Lourdes Medina, an Organizer with the Dolores Huerta Foundation. “We together as Californians can prevent scams from hurting so many people.”

Utility customers are encouraged to visit the CSLB's website to learn more about being "Solar Smart" to prevent risk of fraud. Visit www.cslb.ca.gov/solar for more information. If you think you have already been a victim of solar fraud, report the incident to CSLB at 800-321-CSLB (2752) or www.cslb.ca.gov/consumers. If you have legal concerns, contact the Fresno County District Attorney's Office Consumer and Environmental Protection Division at 559-600-4400.

The CPUC regulates services and utilities, safeguards the environment, and assures Californians' access to safe and reliable utility infrastructure and services. For more information on the CPUC, please visit www.cpuc.ca.gov.

CSLB operates under the umbrella of the Department of Consumer Affairs by licensing and regulating California's 285,000 contractors. In fiscal year 2018-19, CSLB helped recover more than \$49 million in ordered restitution for consumers, making it one of the leading consumer protection agencies in the United States.

The DBO licenses and regulates more than 360,000 individuals and entities that provide financial services in California. The department's regulatory jurisdiction extends over state-chartered banks and credit unions, Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program administrators, money transmitters, securities broker-dealers, investment advisers, non-bank installment lenders, payday lenders, mortgage lenders and servicers, escrow companies, franchisors and more.

The Fresno County District Attorney's Consumer Protection Unit investigates and prosecutes civil and criminal violations of California's consumer protection laws, including unfair business practices and public advertising.

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