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The Future Looks Bright

Heather Leibowitz

As we make the climb out of the winter season, we're bound to see more chilly days, and perhaps frost or even snow on lawns in our neighborhoods.

The other thing we're seeing more of in our neighborhoods are solar panels powering homes, schools and businesses with renewable energy.

Solar power delivers exciting benefits to the environment and electric grid. Among the many advantages of solar power are cleaner air, thousands of local jobs and lower energy bills.

What's not to like?

Unfortunately, some utility companies are trying to stomp out rooftop solar power, claiming that solar panel owners are unjustly subsidized by non-solar customers.

A new report by the [Environment New York Research & Policy Center](#) shows the opposite is likely true – that solar power provides more benefits than the credits it receives from utilities.

The report, [Shining Rewards](#), looks at a program known as net metering – a system used in over 40 states where solar users earn credit on their energy bills for the excess power their solar panels send to their neighbors. It works similarly to rollover minutes on a cellphone bill and has helped the United States reach over one million solar installations.

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Some utilities have rolled back or eliminated the credit solar customers receive through net metering, seeing rooftop solar as a threat to their business model. Recently in Nevada, the major utility successfully eliminated the program, driving away a nascent but rapidly growing solar industry. So far, New York leaders have stood up to those who have wanted to stop progress of rooftop solar. We need to make sure they know how much support there is for solar power and continue to push back against attempts to stunt the growth of renewable energy.

Our report shows that the utilities are taking the wrong approach to rooftop solar. We reviewed 16 studies on the value of solar around the country. On average, the report shows that when all the benefits of solar energy are considered, solar is worth more than the retail rate of electricity, often the rate solar owners earn from utilities for their extra power.

In short, it seems rooftop solar is actually a bargain for utility companies, not a burden.

It makes sense. When you take into account the vast benefits of solar, everybody wins. Our report shows there are real, quantifiable benefits of having more solar in our neighborhoods: avoiding air pollution, reducing the need for expensive utility infrastructure like new power plants, lowering the cost of environmental compliance, avoiding other energy costs, creating local jobs, not creating greenhouse gas emissions and making the power grid more resilient.

These benefits are worth being truly enthusiastic about. So let's not let utilities put a freeze on solar power. Let's embrace the benefits it provides to our environment, our communities and our power system.

Heather Leibowitz, Esq. is the Director of Environment New York, a statewide advocacy organization that is dedicated to protecting our air, water and open spaces.

*The MAHB Blog is a venture of the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere.
Questions should be directed to joan@mahbonline.org*

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