Alternative energy for residential homes

Types Of Home Alternative Energy

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Installing residential renewable energy systems, such as geothermal heat pumps and wind or solar energy systems, can save energy, lower utility bills, and earn homeowners money.

Making the home energy-efficient before installing a renewable energy system will save money on electricity bills. Energy-efficiency improvements can conserve energy and prevent heat or cool air from escaping. Homeowners can obtain home energy assessments and install proper insulation, air sealing, and ENERGY STAR(R)-qualified windows, heating and cooling equipment, kitchen appliances, and lighting systems. Smart water use, available daylight, proper landscaping, and native vegetation can also improve home efficiency.

Once home energy-efficiency improvements have been made, homeowners are best positioned to consider options for installing a renewable energy system.

Solar water heaters use sunlight to heat water for the home. Solar water heating systems use insulated storage tanks and solar collectors to capture and retain heat from the sun, and heat circulating water. Solar water heaters require a backup system, such as conventional hot water heaters, when there is insufficient sunlight.

Federal and state incentives can significantly reduce the upfront costs of installing a renewable energy system. The Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency can help homeowners find incentives near them. Plus, renewable energy systems can pay for themselves over time. Grid-connected solar and wind systems are particularly cost-effective because excess electricity is sent back to the power grid and can earn homeowners direct rebates or credits from local utility providers.

Many homeowners can sell any excess energy their solar and wind systems produce back to their utility providers and, therefore, pay off their renewable energy investments more quickly. Most states have established "net metering" rules for customers who generate excess electricity through solar, wind, or other systems and feed it into the grid. In net metering, a bi-directional meter records both the electricity the home draws from the grid and the excess electricity the homeowner"s system feeds back into the grid.

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Planning for a home renewable energy system is a process that includes analyzing your existing electricity use, looking at local codes and requirements, deciding if you want to operate your system on or off of the electric grid, and understanding technology options you have for your site. | Photo courtesy of Thomas Kelsey/U.S. Department of Energy Solar Decathlon

Maybe you are considering purchasing a renewable energy system to generate electricity at your home. Although it takes time and money to research, buy, and maintain a system, many people enjoy the independence they gain and the knowledge that their actions are helping the environment.

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