



Fire Risks of Solar PV Installations - Five Precautions a Home Owner Should Consider

By Patrick Trowbridge

<http://www.contemporaryenergy.co.uk>

Although correctly installed solar PV systems rarely cause a fire there is a greater chance that they may be involved in a fire that emanates from the building where such a system is installed. A fire in these circumstances would increase the risk to the home owner and to the emergency service personnel. There are some simple precautions homeowners can take which would help prepare for such an eventuality and perhaps reduce the severity of the consequences.

1. The most important precaution is to inform your local fire department that your property has been fitted with a solar PV system. They need to know the location and number of solar panels and also the location of the inverter and associated electrical equipment. In the event of a fire they would arrive fully aware of all the hazards and extra precautions they would need to take. This is best done at the time of installation. It should also be mentioned during a call to the emergency services.
2. Again with the emergency responders in mind, ensure that the installers have correctly placed warning stickers on the inverter, isolators and all electrical switches associated with the PV system. This will help the fire fighters quickly identify how to shut down the system safely.
3. Check with your house insurers before you install solar PV to see what their attitude is to insuring the PV system, any damages caused by fire associated with, or caused by, a solar PV system. Also ask how they would react if the fire service made a tactical decision not to try and save a property due to exceptional risks to their fire fighters. Don't just assume that your house and property insurance will cover every eventuality. It is better to check beforehand.
4. When your PV system has been installed notify your insurance company in writing. It is quite possible that the installation of a solar PV system on your roof would increase the value of your property. When this and all the other risks are taken into account, it is important that you are adequately covered for all potential damage and loss.
5. Finally, in the unlikely event of a fire let the experts deal with it. The emergency services will need all their specialised equipment and training to deal with the hazards. Any effort on your part will at best be futile and at worst be dangerous, creating even more problems for the experts to deal with.

It is better to be prepared than unprepared. In the unlikely event that a fire does occur, these few simple steps could facilitate the work of the emergency services, help reduce the risk of injury to them and to you, and prevent such an emergency becoming worse than it need be.