



How to look for

A solar water heater and/or a photovoltaic system in Hawaii

First, educate yourself, should you or shouldn't you?

Visit your local electrical utility company by calling or going to their website. On Oahu, check www.heco.com for current information about alternative energy sources.

Watch for inserts in your local utility bill or newspaper for information about solar water heaters (heating your water heater with the sun) and photovoltaic (changing sun energy into electricity) systems.

Attend local home improvement stores, seminars, or shows and expos like those at the Neal Blaisdell Center on Ward Avenue.

Ask professionals if installing an energy alternative makes sense for your life and lifestyle. At the least, you need to ask professionals in alternative energy (to find out what options are available), income tax preparation (to see how tax credits can affect your tax return), and financing options (to find out how to pay for the system).

Search the internet for solar energy, alternative energy, solar water heaters, photovoltaic systems, etc.

Second, once you've decided to install alternate energy in your home:

Make list of possible contractors.

Contact the local Better Business Bureau (BBB) on each of those contractors to see what kind of complaint records they have or if any at all. Their website is www.bbb.org. If they are a BBB Member, they will stand by their product or service. If they are not a Member, remember that although they may not have complaints, that does not mean they are ok so you should also ask people you know who have used them.

Talk to others and your neighbors who have installed a solar water heater or a photovoltaic system and which contractors they have used. The best referral is by people you know and trust.

Check the State of Hawaii, Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs or DCCA to make sure the contractors are licensed. The website to verify that they are a registered business in the State of Hawaii is <http://hbe.ehawaii.gov/documents/search.html>. The website to verify if they are a licensed contractor is <http://pvl.ehawaii.gov/pvlsearch/app>. You

should have their license # but if not, you can still search by name. A contractor's license number is preceded by "CT."

Interview at least 3 contractors. This will give you some idea if the contractor is in the ballpark on price and whether they answer your questions adequately or if they are just trying to take your money. Find out what and how much they think you need and when they could possibly install. See if they respond to you in a reasonable time period and if they don't find another one.

Determine how you are going to finance the installation..... savings, credit card, home equity, contractor financing, borrow from mom and dad, etc. Get how much you need to borrow, how long you need to pay and at what interest rate.

Third, sign the contracts:

Once you've completed your investigation phase, make a selection on one of the contractors.

If you are going to finance the installation, contact your credit union to submit the necessary paperwork. Ask if there are any special financing options for a "Green Loan."

Schedule the installation by working with your contractor and your credit union to ensure a smooth experience.

Finally, watch your electric bill decline while you save the earth!

Other ways to save electricity is to

- 1) Lower the water heater thermostat to 120 to 130 degrees instead of 140.
- 2) Install compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs. They cost more than regular bulbs but they use less electricity and last longer.
- 3) Use surge protectors with an on-off switch. These are the phantom "users" of electricity. Although what is plugged into the surge protectors are off, the surge protectors themselves still use electricity.
- 4) Change your appliances if they are over 10 years old. Newer refrigerators and freezers use less electricity than one that is even only 10 years old. Look for Energy Star appliances.
- 5) Look into Energy Star windows. If you have air conditioning in your home, changing those old windows with an energy-efficient one will save wear and tear on your AC system.
- 6) Turn off lights when not in use.

Visit www.HawaiiEnergy.com for more information on energy efficiency.