

RESIDENTIAL SOLAR CONSIDERATIONS

With most residential solar systems being installed and electrically interconnected with your electric provider, Oconto Electric Cooperative should top your list of project contacts when considering such a purchase. OEC is well-versed in both the pros and cons of solar installations. We can help you make an informed decision and navigate the interconnection process (to connect your system to the electric grid). Please contact us for our current application and to schedule your appointment to have the meter installed.

For many homeowners, solar installations are considered an investment. As with any investment, you need a clear understanding of your final investment costs, the annual energy production to be expected along with its corresponding value, and the ability to determine how long it will take before you achieve a return on your investment. If you're considering solar for your home, use the questions and considerations at right to help guide your decision before entering a contract with a solar vendor.

Many solar installers provide quotes using national averages for energy prices to calculate your annual savings. These calculations can be wildly inaccurate as energy prices range considerably across the country. The assumption for increases in energy prices over the lifespan of your solar array can't be ignored but is often calculated at a rate that is higher than that experienced over the last 15-30 years.

To successfully install solar, you must first overcome location obstacles. Choosing an unobstructed, sunny location to install solar panels on your property is important. The choice between a roof or ground-mounted system is also important. The cost for roof installations can vary with different roof designs, just as the location of a ground-mounted array can vary based on soil types and the distance an array is from the interconnection site.

Your home's average energy use will be reflected in your bills from the previous year, and remember, certain factors may change your use over time. For instance, a growing family will use more energy, but the departure of college-age children would reduce energy consumption. Careful consideration and addressing the energy efficiency of your home may reduce the size of the solar array you will need.

Selecting a professional/reputable installer, the right system, and best payment method are equally crucial considerations. Solar installations may be purchased with cash, loans, or leases. An upfront purchase will help you save the most money over the lifespan of the solar panels, but you need the cash upfront. A lease means someone else owns the solar panels and sells you power at a reduced (50¢/kWh) cost each month, but you won't save as much over time. With a loan, the system is yours, but you make monthly payments plus interest.

Solar system warranties are important. The solar panel and inverter manufacturer usually provides a guarantee of 20 to 25 years for the panels and 5 to 25 years for inverters. Moreover, installers may provide a labor warranty.

Installing solar is a major decision. You need a reputable energy partner to help you decide. Remember to contact OEC first. We are ready to answer your questions and help you make an informed decision.



Thinking About Solar?

Installing a rooftop solar system is a major decision. If you're considering solar, use the following questions as a guide before entering a contract to install the system.

Initial Questions

- Do you plan to stay in the home long-term?
- How much shade does your roof receive? (The orientation of your roof can impact how much electricity the system provides.)
- How old is your roof? (If it's old/in poor condition, consider replacing it before installing solar.)
- What are your goals? (If you're looking to save on energy bills, consider an energy audit first.)
- Will you lease or purchase the solar system? (Compare quotes from multiple contractors/installers.)

Utility Questions

- How will you need to work with your electric co-op to connect the solar system (to the electric grid)? (For example, an interconnection agreement must be signed.)
- How long will the process take?
- Does your co-op offer special rates for members with solar systems?

Contractor Questions

- Can the contractor provide appropriate documentation of licensing, permitting, bonding and insurance requirements?
- Can the contractor show documentation of safety practices and how those will be followed?
- Can the contractor provide current credentials?

Contract Questions

- Do the ownership terms make sense/seem fair?
- Do the system performance calculations seem realistic?
- Do the terms change if you sell the property?
- Do the project start and end dates seem reasonable?
- How long is the system warranty?
- Who is responsible for system maintenance?
- Who will receive the renewable energy credits (RECs)?

RETURNING MONEY BACK TO YOU

BENEFIT OF BEING A COOPERATIVE MEMBER

Oconto Electric is a not-for-profit cooperative with members who share in the ownership, maintenance, construction, and success of the cooperative. A benefit of being a cooperative member/owner is the share in the earnings/margins Oconto Electric earns each year.

As you pay for your energy, OEC utilizes the revenue to grow, operate, and maintain a safe and reliable energy system. Any money that is earned over and above the costs of doing business is called margins. Your portion of allocated margins is then returned to you in the form of capital credits.

Capital credits are the most significant source of equity for most cooperatives. They are similar to the dividends that investor-owned utilities pay to their shareholders except that OEC “dividends” go back to the members/owners.

How do you determine how much in capital credits I receive?

At the end of each year OEC divides the dollar value of that year’s margins by the amount of total revenue collected during the year. This is the “allocation factor.” The allocation factor is then multiplied by the amount of revenue each member contributed during that year. This is your share of the margins—or your capital credit allocation—for that year.

What is the difference between allocated and retired capital credits?

Allocated capital credits are the member’s share of net margins and reflect your equity and ownership in Oconto Electric. Members are allocated capital credits, and will receive an allocation notice on their bill when the cooperative earns positive margins. This money is set aside to be used as operating capital for improvements and maintenance over a period of years and to have reserves in case of an emergency.

A retirement is the amount a member receives as a refund. It is a portion of your total allocation. When capital credits are retired, a check or electric bill credit is issued and your equity in the cooperative is reduced.

The board of directors reviews OEC’s financial condition annually and then decides whether to retire capital credits. The board’s goal is to keep capital credit retirements on a 20-year rotation, always retiring the oldest year.

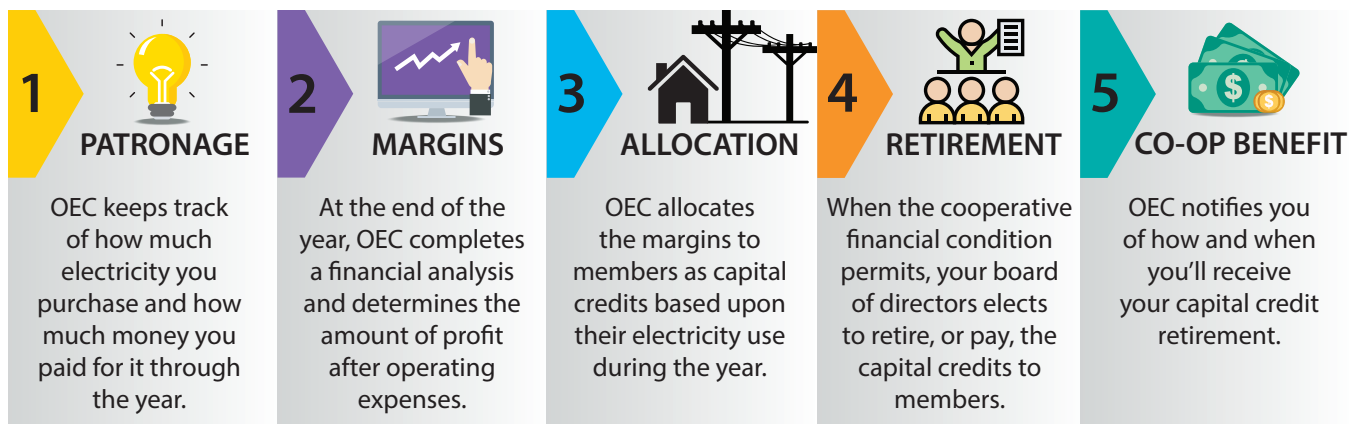
How do I get my capital credits?

This year OEC will be paying out capital credits earned in 2003. If the amount of your retirement in a given year is more than \$50, a check will be sent in late July to the last valid address we have on file. If the amount is less than \$50 and you still purchase electricity from OEC, it will appear as a credit on your July electric bill. If the amount is less than \$50 and you no longer purchase power from OEC, the amount goes into “no check status” which means the money will be held by OEC until there is enough retired to total more than \$50. At that time a check will be sent to the last valid address.

What happens to the money when the member can’t be located?

Capital credits become “unclaimed” when OEC is unable to locate the member after three years. Unclaimed funds, as allowed by state law, are placed in an account with the Federated Youth Foundation. (911000) The money in that account can only be used for education or charitable purposes. Annually OEC funds scholarships for member students pursuing higher education.

If you would like to know more about capital credits, contact OEC at 1-800-472-8410.





Together we can make a difference in our community!

The mission

How can one person help make their community better? Join the Oconto Electric Cooperative Community Change program. By voluntarily “rounding up” your electric bill and contributing a few cents every month, you can help support local charities, individuals, and families in your community.

Introduction

There are seven cooperative principles that are the backbone to OEC’s daily operations. One of these core principles is Concern for Community, which is why OEC adopted the charitable-giving program in 1999.

The program is funded by our member-owners who simply round their monthly electric bill up to the next even dollar amount. The average donation per year is \$6. One hundred percent of the money is given to local concerns, with no funds used for electric bills, administrative costs, or political purposes.

Small change. Big difference.

By simply rounding monthly bills to the nearest dollar, members can make a significant group impact. Every penny that is donated will be pooled together to help local organizations and communities address unmet needs for youth, education, public safety, health, community and emergency services. Collectively and for just pennies a month we can make a difference in our communities!

Please take time to consider how such a small amount of money can make such a great impact on someone who needs your help. Thank you for considering this worthy fund. It is another way that you, the members of Oconto Electric Cooperative, are helping our community. Members are always welcome to donate additional funds to the program, by calling the office.

How to apply

If you know of a charitable or service organization, civic group, or individual with unusual financial needs, you can encourage them to apply for a Community Change grant.

Applications can be found at www.ocontoelectric.com or in the OEC lobby. Applications for the September board meeting must be submitted by August 28.

Grants awarded in 2023

- Three House Fire Victims
- Oconto Falls 4K
- Pine Needle Quilters
- Little Suamico Youth Booster Club - Easter Egg Hunt
- Two Children with Medical Needs
- Gillett PTO for Victory Olympics
- Grace Lutheran Church, Oconto Falls - Community Concert

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Summer is a prime opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors. To reduce home energy use, avoid using your oven and use a grill instead. Not only will cooking outdoors eliminate the electricity used to power the stove, but it will also avoid raising the temperature inside your home, reducing the need for air conditioning or cooling.

You can also avoid using the oven with tasty no-bake recipes. Get creative in the kitchen (or the backyard) and find new ways to save energy!

Source: Dept. of Energy





Oconto Electric Cooperative pole top/bucket training was held in May. In an unlikely event that a lineman is on a pole or in the bucket of a bucket truck and has a major medical emergency, his fellow linemen are the first responders. It's a training we hope they never have to use, but we're thankful they get the opportunity to learn how to keep each other safe! Pictured above is apprentice lineman Maguire Girtz.

COMMON CAUSES of HOME ELECTRICAL FIRES



An average of 346,800 home fires occur every year, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Electrical issues (either failure or malfunction) account for 46,700 of those fires.

Common Causes

The most common causes of electrical fires are incorrectly installed wiring; overloaded circuits or extension cords; defective or improper plugs, switches or outlets; and the misuse or poor maintenance of lighting.

Warning Signs

Know the signs that indicate a possible wiring or electrical problem. These include flickering or dimming lights; discolored cords, outlets or switch plates; switches or outlets that are hot to the touch or emit an odor; and recurring blown fuses and tripped circuit breakers.

Prevention

Hire a qualified electrician to examine and repair any electrical issues in your home. Do not take on do-it-yourself electrical projects if you are not qualified.

Learn more:



Sources: NFPA, The Hartford

HIDDEN ACCOUNT NUMBERS

Oconto Electric Cooperative hides two account numbers in the local pages of the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* each month. If you spot your account number, call our office before you receive the next issue, and OEC will give you a \$15 credit on your electric bill or a \$25 credit if you have a load management receiver. The June account numbers belonged to Brian Osterberg, Coleman, and Jeanne Neta, Oconto.

Byron C. Nolde, CEO

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