

Is your system is performing at its peak?

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How do you choose a contractor to do your new solar system? Whom do you trust with your design and install? Where do you look for a contractor? Solar is a unique product and, as with any industry, there are good contractors and bad. Some you won't know if you like them until the job is done.

You may not know if your system is performing at its peak. Alternative Power Systems, Inc. is one of those contractors that will provide an honest and code compliant bid and installation. But, whether you chose us or another here are some things to consider.

First let's talk about design. There are those that talk a fantastic story of all those wonder products that are not on the market.

The old adage "if it sounds too good to be true it probably is" applies here. Grandiose claims is a sure sign you should grab your wallet and run.

The contractor should be up front with answering design questions. If you feel your questions are not getting answered, ask again. No answer is an indication the contractor does not understand the equipment. Also, the contractor should be able to show you a string sizing table, line drawings and solar radiation report. He should be able to give you pay back times, tax and rebate information. Ask the contractor if he is NABCEP certified.

Certification will tell you he has at the very least been exposed to the knowledge needed to do a good design and installation.

The estimate should be scrutinized. Little hidden lines like those that say "estimate only," "price may vary," or "may be subject to change" are tell-tale signs of hidden costs.

The cost could be as much as the contractor wants to charge over the estimate. The contractor that uses these tricks may not know his true costs. Sometimes, it is a ploy to take advantage of an unsuspecting patron. A contractor should be able to give you a firm bid. He should know his product and its costs.

If the cost is a lot lower than the average of every other contractor bid he may be bidding too low to stay in business. No one can do it a lot cheaper. The contractor may be

selling a system too small or leaving key components out to make the install code compliant and safe.

He may not be around very long if he does not charge enough. How long has the contractor been in business? Will he be there to support you — the customer — and the product? Does he pay his bills on time? The financial stability of the company is important. So many contractors get themselves in financial trouble these days.

Every contractor has his style of sales.

In my experience, you want a down to earth person that can explain the system in terms you can understand. Integrity is a quality that alludes so many. Keeping to one's word is an important quality-if the contractor says he will do something then he should hold to it. Read the fine print!

Contracts are the standard of doing business today. Before you sign, make sure the wording is right. Every contractor should have specifics in the contract such as; payment schedules, warranties, unforeseeable events, change orders and the amount you will owe when the job is done.

It matters not who you are; you want to put your best foot forward. Asking for references is a good practice. But keep in mind the contractor is giving you names of people that will give him a good reference. Ask for some of his suppliers. Ask around for people that have solar systems and ask them for references.

It is my intent to share some of the experiences I have had with customers that were dissatisfied with their contractor. In this industry most sales are a one-time shot.

If you do a bad job and the customer is dissatisfied you already have his money. If there are problems you don't want the same contractor to come out. He is the one that created the problem.

Last thing, people get contractors confused. If you notice advertising or call a contractor, make a note which company it was. It's a real disappointment when your advertising is working for the competitor. Getting more than one bid is always wise. Realize that it takes a lot to keep the doors open. Internet sales are wonderful for most things, but for solar it is also dangerous. There have been a few homes burnt down, because of a bad "do it yourself" installation. Contractors can't compete with

the internet. Part of the price is the guarantee that comes with it. Keep in mind if something should go wrong what will the internet do for you? A good contractor will come out and replace the product within

the warranty period at no charge. The internet will only say send it back and we will send you a new one at your expense.

Hope this is of some help. Make sure you use only licensed, insured

and don't forget to ask for the NABCEP certified contractors.

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