



THE HOMEOWNERS GUIDE TO SELECTING THE RIGHT SOLAR INSTALLATION COMPANY

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The demand for solar PV installations not only in residential but commercial properties too, has shown a substantial upward growth trend over the last few years. The increased load shedding schedules have proven extremely challenging, and residents having deal with a multitude of needs in a household especially during the many stages of load shedding. For those who are fortunate enough to embark on a solar installation journey, one needs to be warned that this process that seems so simple, is in fact a far more complex and challenging one. Many who have already spent their hard-earned cash on investing in a solar PV system have often regretted or remain bitter about their experience, due to their choice of installer who was either not reputable and/or reliable.

The best way to check a solar company's reputation is based on speaking with previous customers or seeing their historical work. This can provide a glimpse into the reputation and credibility of your solar installer.

Education and awareness are key factors

When clients are embarking on a solar installation project, they need to be aware of the regulations in place regarding their project. Cost-saving is always a priority for any client, and in most cases, cheaper is not always better. The most cost effective way is to be informed enough to ensure that the installer designs the system according to what is actually needed and not what the installer is wanting to sell.

Many service providers do not conduct enough due diligence and the client is then provided with an inaccurate estimate.

Due to solar PV systems being so popular, there are many companies who are conducting solar installations without being fully accredited and having the correct know how and knowledge. Companies who are conducting solar installations and are not accredited need to be cautious as this is a serious offense and can mean jail time if something serious happens as a result thereof. Most clients do not possess the technical knowledge and know how, and therefore not equipped to know whether the solar installation meets all the safety and technical requirements. On many occasions, clients have called upon The Energy Gurus team to assist with issues when a solar installation project has been completed by another company, and in some instances unfortunately, the client needs to spend additional money to rectify the issues.

The Energy Gurus team will conduct a site visit, design a system for the client's home also taking into consideration any other work that may need to be done, the current electricity usage, the generation and battery power, etc. Once this system has been completed, the team is then able to provide the client with an estimate of their cost saving per month so that they are able to establish whether the solar project is a viable one or not.

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Gurus explains, *“Before quoting a client, the team needs to conduct a site visit, and from there a customized system is built. This service offering is in fact the most expensive part of the process when compared to the cost of the standardized items such as the inverters, batteries, and panels. The system takes into consideration the earthing requirements of the project to ensure that safety is a priority. Many clients are also unaware that a service provider who is accredited by the Department of Labour is qualified to be able to produce a certificate of compliance (COC). In many instances, clients have fallen victim in the case where a company is not accredited by the Department of Labour, and in the unfortunate incident of a fire, an insurance claim will be a challenging one due to the non-compliance of the COC. For compliance and safety, clients must ensure the installer is accredited to compile and issue a legitimate COC test report.”*

Safety is non-negotiable

There is a vast lack of knowledge amongst homeowners and non-accredited installers regarding the regulations for solar PV installations and the earthing system requirements that need to be in place for safety reasons. In some instances, companies simply ensure that the wiring is bonded but not actually earthed and there are often serious consequences when a solar installation is done without taking the earthing system into consideration. An earthing system not in place can have serious consequences such as electrocution and even death.

Always read the fine print, especially on warranties and guarantees

Very often when a client signs a contract with an installer, and the excitement of having a solar PV system installed overshadows the need to look at the fine print and to ask important questions such as the warranties and guarantees that the company offers. It is critical to remember that when one is making such an investment, to ensure that information on the warranty and guaranty both on the products and service needs to be looked at. Also, equally important is the after sales support offered, should the client experience any challenges post installation. Another important consideration is replacement

stock if a faulty product has been installed. For example, if there is an issue with the inverter, the installer will remove the installed inverter and have it sent to the manufacturer that it was purchased from, but should not leave the customer without a replacement inverter for that period of time.

Timeframe - What to expect

On average, a residential installation takes between one and three days to complete. In some instances, where there may be some challenges (eg: electrical issues or where specific batteries are out of stock) the project may be delayed. A client should be wary that if an installation takes longer than a week without any such challenges and product delays, that this could be a red flag and something may be wrong.

Quality standards and regulations

Clients should ensure that the products used and installed are of the highest standard and endorsed by the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS). The installer should also ensure that the manufacturer the products are procured from, have the necessary certification and the IEC (Independent Electoral Commission) test certificates so that all partners are aligned to the industry's standards.

Familiarize yourself with your system

Once a solar PV system is installed, the client should be trained by the installer on how to use and manage the system for their home so that they are able to get the best value for money, and to experience as few issues as possible. Within a week some clients are easily able to manage their home solar system and are aware of what appliances can be switched on and off in order to make use of the available power optimally for a longer period of time.

The Energy Gurus advice when choosing a solar installation expert is to investigate as much about the company as possible, and to perhaps look at their website or social media pages. This first step in the process is crucial and it is important to note that although a company's quotation may be considerably cheaper, it may not necessarily mean that you will be receiving value for money.