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NEWS RELEASE

Counter to utility claims, studies show solar users provide net benefits

Phoenix, AZ – Solar panels provide pollution free energy that delivers far reaching benefits to the environment and the electric grid, said a new report released today by Environment America Research & Policy Center. The report outlines how solar panels on homes, schools and businesses often provide more benefits than they receive through programs like net metering, counter to utility claims that solar owners don't pay their fair share.

"Solar power's rewards are far greater than its costs," said Bret Fanshaw, Environment America's solar program coordinator and report co-author. "We should be encouraging even more solar, not penalizing it."

The Environment America Research & Policy Center report, *Shining Rewards: The Value of Rooftop Solar Power for Consumers and Society* (2016 edition) comes as policymakers around the country consider proposals from utilities to undermine successful solar energy programs, including net metering.

"Today, the vast majority of our electricity comes from sources like gas and coal, that are pushing us toward the brink of catastrophic climate change," said Gideon Weissman of Frontier Group, report coauthor. "Our analysis shows that the people and businesses who invest in rooftop solar aren't just guiding us away from the cliff, they're also providing benefits to society and to their fellow ratepayers."

Solar energy on rooftops can help communities to avoid greenhouse gas emissions, reduce air pollution harmful to public health and create local jobs, the report shows. Net metering programs credit solar panel owners when they generate more power than they use, providing electricity for other customers. Utilities then credit solar panel owners a fixed rate – often the retail price of electricity – for providing excess power to the grid, similar to rollover minutes on a cell phone plan.

The arrangements have helped solar energy skyrocket, but in recent years utilities have increasingly attacked them as unjustified “subsidies”, including in Nevada, where utility NV Energy urged regulators to end the state’s retail rate net metering program.

Today’s report tells a different story. An examination of studies from around the country shows that the dollar and cents value of solar is often higher than the credit utilities provide to customers.

"When value exceeds costs, everyone benefits through lower rates," said Karl R. Rábago, Pace Energy and Climate Center executive director and national expert in value of solar studies. "Utilities should start working with customers and regulators to make more solar and more savings happen."

Of the 16 studies reviewed, 12 found that the value of solar energy was higher than the average local residential retail electricity rate. The median value of solar power across all 16 studies was around 16 cents per unit, compared to the nation’s average retail electricity rate of about 13 cents per unit.

In other words: utilities were likely underpaying solar panel owners, not subsidizing them.

“Rooftop solar users are givers, not takers, when it comes to the value they provide to society and the electric system.” said Fanshaw, “In many cases it appears that solar programs are a bargain for utilities, not a burden.”

All 16 studies found that solar panel users offered the electric system net benefits.

Solar advocates hoped today's report would shed new light on the way net metering and other pro-solar programs can benefit communities across the country, in the face of dozens of utility proposals to end or severely alter net metering programs.

"There's so much to gain by going big on solar, but so much to lose if some utilities get their way," said Fanshaw. "Let's make sure we take full advantage of all the benefits by allowing solar to continue to grow in all our states."

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Environment America Research & Policy Center is the national federation of statewide advocacy organizations bringing people together for a cleaner, greener, healthier future.