

Darebin Solar Saver and Bulk Buy

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



Thank you for your interest in Darebin’s solar programs!

In this document we answer the most common questions people have about our solar programs. If you’re interested in participating, please read through this document carefully so that you understand all the steps and processes involved

If you have any remaining questions please don’t hesitate to get in touch:

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We look forward to doubling solar in Darebin with you!

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General information about our solar programs

The benefits of installing solar through Council

The Solar Saver and Bulk Buy programs are designed to help Darebin residents, organisations and businesses install solar power, for their own benefit, and the benefit of the broader community.

Many people in Darebin are interested in installing solar but are unable, or hesitate for various reasons:

The upfront cost of installing solar

- Through the Solar Saver Program, we can help you by paying the entire upfront cost of your solar system and installation. You then pay it back slowly over 10 years, interest free.
- While paying back the system you are saving on your power bills, leaving you better off overall.

Knowing which company to trust

- **We've done the homework for you** via a competitive tender process to find reliable providers who offer quality and value for money.
- We have arranged industry-leading 10 year product and installation warranties, and the panels have a 25 year performance warranty.

Technical details

- **You don't need to understand all of the technical details** to choose the right product.
- We have set high quality and efficiency standards for the products we allow through the program, and our installers will help you choose the right size of system for your roof and your needs.

Financial benefits

- The competitive tender process delivers **good value for money** for Council and our community.
- We will give you an indication of how much you can expect to save. Most households will be between \$100 and \$1000 better off every year, even after making repayments.
- If your savings are likely to be low, we will alert you so you can make an informed choice.

Solar Saver vs Bulk Buy: What's the difference?

Through the Solar Saver program Council pays the upfront cost; through the Bulk Buy program you pay the upfront cost.

Solar Saver program – Council pays upfront

- Council pays the upfront cost of the system.
- You pay it back over 10 years, interest free.
- You don't pay GST because Council is GST exempt.
- Choices are limited to set packages at set prices (batteries are not included).

Bulk Buy program – You pay upfront

- You pay the upfront cost of the system.
- The system is more expensive because you pay GST.
- You may be able to negotiate the inclusion of a battery, a different inverter (potentially including micro-inverters), different panels, and other variations – this is at the discretion of the solar company.
- You are likely to get your system installed sooner (especially if you have registered in the past 6-12 months) because you don't need to wait for the Council process of administering the Special Charge and the waiting list is much shorter.

Benefits of both programs

- We have done the homework for you, via a competitive tender process, to find a **reliable installer and value for money**.
- We have negotiated a **10 year warranty** for parts and installation.
- While we don't use the most expensive products, we have set a **high quality standard** in terms of manufacturing quality and the efficiency of the system.
- Installers must be **Clean Energy Council registered installers** and adhere to strict safety and quality standards.

What about solar for business and other organisations?

Businesses, NGOs, community groups and other organisations can also participate in our solar programs. If you're interested please go through the standard [registration](#) process and we will contact you when the next round opens.

Additional options for non-residential installations:

- For small installations, up to 10kW, organisations go through the standard program processes, using the solar provider we select through the tender process.
- For medium sized installations, 10-30kW, you will receive a quote from each of the companies on our panel of providers. It is then up to you to select which quote best meets your needs.

- For systems larger than 30kW Council will assist you in accessing funding through an Environmental Upgrade Agreement (EUA).

Can I also get the State Government rebate?

Yes, participants in both the Solar Saver program (where Council pays upfront) and the Bulk Buy program (where you pay upfront) can apply for the State Government Solar Homes rebate as a point-of-sale reduction to the total cost of your solar system.

Please visit the Solar Homes website for more details and to check your eligibility:

<https://www.solar.vic.gov.au>

What is the process of getting solar through Council?

Who can apply?

Our solar programs are open to all households, businesses and organisations in Darebin.

Anyone can apply as long as:

- The property is in Darebin.
- You are the property owner (or ratepayer) OR you are a renter but have permission from the owner (or ratepayer). We can help you if you haven't yet had a conversation with your landlord, owners' corporation or housing provider.
- Note: In earlier rounds of the program only pensioners and low income householders were eligible. This is no longer the case, however, we do prioritise pensioners and low income households to make the programs as accessible to all Darebin households as possible.

Find out more about the below specific cases from page 17 (or by clicking the below links if viewed on a computer):

- [Landlords](#)
- [Renters/tenants](#)
- [People living in flats, units and apartment buildings](#)

How do I apply?

- Participation is voluntary and obligation-free. You need to register if you want to participate in the program.
- Register online at darebin.vic.gov.au/solar
 - Call us on 8470 8389 and we can register your details over the phone
 - OR call 8470 8470 if you like an interpreter to help you in a language other than English.

- By registering your interest you *are likely to* be offered a quotation for a solar system. Council **cannot guarantee** you will be able to get an installation through our programs as this depends on the suitability of your property and availability.
- You can withdraw at any time up until your system is installed.

What are the steps involved for me?

What steps are involved for you depends on whether you proceed with the Solar Saver program (where Council pays upfront) or the Bulk Buy program (where you pay upfront). The steps for each program are outlined below.

Remember that you need to be ready to have a site visit, and your property needs to be ready to have a solar system installed. If you're going to be away, or you have renovations planned, please let us know.

Steps in the Solar Saver program:

- Step 1. **Register:** You register your interest in the Solar Saver program.
- Step 2. **Program opens:** Council will contact you to confirm your details, request some additional information, and make sure you are ready for the supplier to arrange a visit and quotation with you. At this time we will let you know which solar company will be working with us.
- Step 3. **Site visit:** When you're ready we will pass your details on to the solar company and they will contact you to arrange a site visit and give you a quotation. The site visit is to ensure that your property is suitable for a solar installation. At this time please inform the solar company if you have any preferences about system size, roof location, or access issues.

NOTE: Before or during the site visit you will need to provide the solar company with a recent power bill. This is important for them to estimate your usage and potential savings, and record your smart-meter number for activation. This number will also be provided to Council.
- Step 4. **Quotation:** Your quotation is obligation-free and you can request changes if the quote does not meet your needs. If at this stage you choose not to go ahead please let us know and we will withdraw you from the program.
- Step 5. **Signing agreement with Council:** If you accept the quotation, Council will send you an agreement based on that quote. If you wish to accept the offer, you sign the agreement with Council to pay off the system through the Special Charge scheme.
- Step 6. **Special Charge process:** Council goes through a process to have the Special Charge approved, and will contact you when the installation phase is about to get underway.
- Step 7. **Installation:** The supplier will contact you to arrange a time to install your system.

- Step 8. **Grid connection:** After the installation, the solar company will contact your Electricity Distributor (CitiPower, Jemena or AusNet) to make sure your solar system gets connected to the grid. This can take some time to be processed – often four to eight weeks.
- Step 9. **Repayments:** Your repayment details are given to Council’s Revenue Services team, who administer rates and charges, to begin collecting your repayments.
- Step 10. **Make the most of it!** We will stay in touch to make sure you know how to get the most out of your system. If there are any problems with your system, you can get in touch with the supplier. If you are not able to resolve the issue with them, we will assist you.

Steps in the Bulk Buy program:

- Step 1. **Register:** You register your interest in the Bulk Buy program.
- Step 2. **Bulk Buy round opens:** We confirm with you that you’re ready to proceed with the Bulk Buy.
- Step 3. **Site visit:** Council passes your details on to the solar provider and they contact you to arrange a site visit and quotation.
- Step 4. **Quotation:** You receive the quotation and if you wish to proceed you arrange payment directly to the solar provider.
- Step 5. **Installation:** Your solar system is installed.
- Step 6. **Make the most of it!** You do not have any contractual agreement with Council, but we will stay in touch to make sure you know how to get the most out of your system.

What if I change my mind?

Participation in our solar programs is completely voluntary - there is no obligation for you to go ahead with a solar installation.

In the Solar Saver program, if you need to withdraw for any reason, you can - even after you have agreed to the quotation or signed the agreement. As long as your system has not yet been installed, all you need to do is tell us in writing and we can withdraw you from the program.

With the Bulk Buy program you enter into an agreement with the solar provider directly, and if you sign an agreement with them you will need to negotiate with them if you want to change or withdraw your agreement.

When will my system be installed?

From receiving a site visit and quote to getting the system installed can take 3-9 months. From first registration it can take longer.

How long it takes will depend on when you sign up, what stage the project is up to, and how much demand there is. As a rough guide, installations for the current

round of Solar Saver will occur from April to July 2019. Installations for the next round are likely to occur in the second half of this year.

We are committed to keeping you informed of our progress and will be working with you over that time to make sure the installation process runs smoothly when it commences.

The installation itself can usually be completed in a single day, or two days for larger systems. Once your system is installed it may take some weeks for your retailer to connect your system to the grid. The installer will submit this request on your behalf once your system has been installed.

Why is there a delay for Solar Saver installations?

- Because Solar Saver involves an addition to your rates payments called a Special Charge, the Victorian Government requires us to go through some formal processes. These take several months.
- We have many people on our waiting list.

The required processes include:

- Finalizing the details of every household participating in the Special Charge Scheme
- Giving public notice of the Special Charge Scheme (including the list of properties to be included)
- Writing to all affected ratepayers
- Allowing at least 28 days for people to make submissions
- Considering the scheme and any submissions at a Council meeting before adopting the Scheme.

Will I need a permit? What about heritage status?

You won't need a planning permit to install solar unless you are in a heritage area or your property is a listed heritage building. Generally, even if you are in a heritage area, if your panels are not visible from the street (or a public park) you won't need a permit. Usually only about 5-10% of Darebin applicants need a permit. You will need to lodge a planning permit if you reside in a heritage overlay area and decide to proceed with an installation. If you require assistance with this process you can contact us and we will guide you through the process.

What happens if I sell my house?

The special charge is applied to the property and not the property owner. If you decide to sell your property, the remaining amount is attached as a Section 32 against the title of the property. When your property is sold, any remaining repayments to Council will be taken out of the proceeds of the sale, like any other rates or charges you owe to Council.

What is the “Authority to Release Information to Third Parties form” for?

We will send you a form asking for authority to release information to third parties. This allows us to collect your smart meter data directly from your energy provider. You do not have to sign this form. If you do that will help us to understand the outcomes of the project.

Details of your solar installation

What size solar system will I need?

The solar provider will talk to you about what size system will fit on your roof and best meet your needs. With the current feed-in-tariff, larger systems will generally deliver greater financial savings. Unless you have extremely low electricity usage, we often recommend you install the largest system that can fit on your roof.

Through these programs we can offer systems between 1.5kW (6 panels) and 10kW (36 panels), which will suit most homes.

Business/commercial installations can be much larger.

What are the technical details of the systems?

- Panels: Trina Honey panels (330w) (Tier 1)
- Inverters: Sungrow
- Mounting: Clenergy
- Three-phase inverters will be available for larger systems.

Who will install the systems?

Solar Gain is the solar provider for this round of the Darebin Solar Saver program.

Where are the panels and inverter made?

While Council would like to offer Australian-made panels and inverters, currently the price is prohibitive. We offer Trina panels and Sungrow inverters (both made in China).

Through the tender specifications Council has ensured that all panels and inverters are both affordable and high quality. Panels are sourced from Tier 1 manufacturers (the highest level in the Bloomberg ranking system), and inverters must meet the highest efficiency standards.

Warranty: How long will it last?

All components (inverter and panels) come with a 10 year product warranty. The installation and workmanship also come with 10 year warranties. In addition, the panels come with 25 year performance warranty, meaning that if they degrade to a point where they do not meet performance expectations within that period, they

will be replaced. As a rough guide, solar panels have a life expectancy of around 25 years. These panels are made with a low-iron tempered glass face and are specifically designed and certified to withstand large hailstones. The aluminium frames are anodized for extra durability and long life.

What about insurance?

We recommend that you check with your insurance provider to ensure that your panels are covered by your insurance in case something happens to them that is outside the conditions of the warranty, particularly during the period when you are still paying them back.

Costs, savings and repayments

How much will it cost?

Remember that if you participate in the Solar Saver program, Council pays the upfront cost and you pay it back slowly over ten years (or sooner if you prefer), interest free.

The only upfront expense for most households will be the connection fee through your energy retailer, usually in the order of \$50-150, which will be added to your next electricity bill after your system is installed. Talk to us if you are concerned about this fee.

An indication of costs for various system sizes is given below, to be paid off over 10 years. These figures include Small-scale Technology Certificates (STCs) discounts, but do not include the State Government rebate (of up to \$1,880), which can reduce the cost to you even further. These should be used as a rough guide only as there may be additional costs depending on your property (see below).

| 1.5 kW | 2 kW | 3 kW | 4 kW | 5 kW | 6 kW | 8 kW | 10 kW |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| \$2,500- \$4,000 | \$2,500- \$4,500 | \$3,200- \$5,000 | \$4,000- \$5,500 | \$4,500- \$6,000 | \$5,200- \$7,000 | \$7,000- \$9,000 | \$7,800- \$10,00 |

The actual cost of your solar system depends on various things, like the following:

- The size of your system (i.e. how many solar panels you get installed)
- The type of roof and property you have. There are extra charges for:
 - Double storey properties
 - Steep roofs
 - Properties requiring additional equipment or access methods such as scaffolding, scissor lifts etc
 - Tilt frames for flat roofs and brackets for tiled roofs
 - Split arrays – when panels cannot all fit on one section of the roof and have to be split across more than one

- Tiled roofs
- Unconventional roof types
- Optimisers if your roof has some shading or the configuration is split
- Three-phase power.
- Whether you go with the Solar Saver or Bulk Buy program
 - Bulk Buy prices are 10% higher than due to GST
- Potential additional associated costs outside of the solar programs
 - If you don't have a smart-meter you will need a new one installed. The provider we use will organise this.
 - If you have two meters you will need to have them consolidated. This could cost around \$500. This is not common, but if you are in this situation we will roll any associated costs into your Special Charge.
- If your switchboard needs to be upgraded or replaced in order to accommodate a solar system safely, this could cost up to an additional \$800-1,000. You can arrange for this yourself, or you can have it included in your Solar Saver repayment plan.
- If your house needs to be rewired in order to accommodate solar safely, you would need to pay for this. You should seek an assessment and quote from an electrician for this before proceeding and be aware that rewiring can be very costly.
- If your property needs repairs or asbestos removal in order to accommodate solar, you will need to arrange and pay for this yourself.

Our solar provider will give you a quotation after they visit and assess your property. They will check whether any of the above upgrades are applicable to your property and if required they will be explained to you and, if applicable, reflected in your quote.

How do I pay my system off over time?

If you participate in the Solar Saver program:

- Council pays the upfront cost and you pay your system off over time.
- After your system is installed, Council will send you a quarterly Special Charge notice, just like we send you a quarterly rates notice. You pay off your system in this way over 10 years, or you can choose to pay it off more quickly. You won't be charged interest, and the savings you make on your electricity bill should more than cover these Special Charge payments.
- After you have paid off your system, it belongs to you and you continue to save. Until then, Council owns your system.

If you participate in the Bulk Buy program:

- You pay for the system upfront directly to the solar company and there are no payments or repayments made to Council.

How much money will I save?

These programs are designed to save you money. Most people will save between \$100 - \$1000 per year. The exact amount of savings will be different for each participant and depend on:

- The size of the solar system you choose - larger systems typically result in greater savings.
- How much electricity you use and what time of day you use it. You save more when you use the power that your system generates during the day, rather than exporting it to the grid.
- How much you pay for your electricity.
- The feed-in tariff you receive. This is the price you get paid when you export power to the grid. The minimum flat rate feed in tariff is 9.9c/kWh.

It is impossible to calculate exactly how much you will save because of all the variables involved, but your quote will include an indicative range of savings expected for your property.

Important note on savings:

Your power bill will not show you how much money you have saved by using your own solar power, it only shows how much electricity you sold back to the grid (exported). That is the energy that you generated additional to what you used yourself. This means that most of your savings are not visible on your bill because you simply used the power from your solar system and didn't need to buy it. Your inverter records will show how much power you produced, however, and you should notice a significant drop in your bills.

In this way, generating your own solar power is like growing your own veggies. It means you need to buy fewer groceries, and you might sell some spare veggies. But your groceries bill would only show how much you sold back to the grocer, not how many veggies you grew and ate yourself, and hence didn't need to buy.

How do I maximize savings from my solar system?

The more of your daily power usage that happens during the day (when you're producing solar power), the greater your savings will be. This is because you pay more for power you buy than you get paid for selling it back to the grid.

This is how solar batteries help; they store the power you produce during the day for you to use after the sun sets. However, even if you're out during the day and don't have a battery, you can still maximize your solar savings by using power during the day, rather than in the early morning or evening.

If you have an electric oven or stove, do your cooking or baking during the day. If you have appliances with timers, set them to operate during the day. Many modern washing machines, dishwashers and ovens have timers on them.

What is the feed-in-tariff? What will I see on my bills?

When your solar system generates more electricity than you're using in your home, excess power is exported to the grid and you receive credits on your bill for that amount.

It is rare for people to export so much that their bill goes below zero, but in theory it's possible, and your retailer would have to pay you the difference (or more likely give you a credit for a future bill).

How much you are credited for the electricity you export to the grid is called the 'feed-in-tariff'. A higher feed-in-tariff means you get greater savings from your solar system.

- The minimum flat rate feed-in-tariff that electricity retailers *must* offer is 12.0.c/kWh (July 2019-June 2020)).
- Retailers can also voluntarily offer time-varying tariffs as in the table below :
Time varying tariff (2019-2020):

Feed-in tariffs from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020



The 2019-20 'single rate' minimum feed-in tariff is 12.0 cents per kilowatt hour

The single rate feed-in tariff applies regardless of the time of day or day of the week.



The 2019-20 'time varying' minimum feed-in tariff will be between 9.9 cents and 14.6 cents per kilowatt hour

Under the time varying tariff, customers are credited between 9.9 cents and 14.6 cents per kilowatt hour of electricity exported, depending on the time of day.

The time-varying tariff for certain times of day is outlined in this table:

| Period | Weekday | Weekend | Rate: cents per kilowatt hour (c/kWh) |
|----------|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|
| Off peak | 10 pm to 7 am | 10 pm to 7 am | 9.9 c/kWh |
| Shoulder | 7 am to 3 pm, 9 pm to 10 pm | 7am to 10pm | 11.6 c/kWh |
| Peak | 3 pm to 9 pm | n/a | 14.6 c/kWh |

Table from Essential Services Commission website. (<https://www.esc.vic.gov.au/electricity-and-gas/electricity-and-gas-tariffs-and-benchmarks/minimum-feed-tariff>)

- This may be a better tariff for you, but it is voluntary for retailers to offer this at this stage, so you may need to shop around to get this.
- Some retailers will only offer this tariff in combination with higher electricity rates for what you purchase from the grid, so look carefully at the deal you are offered.

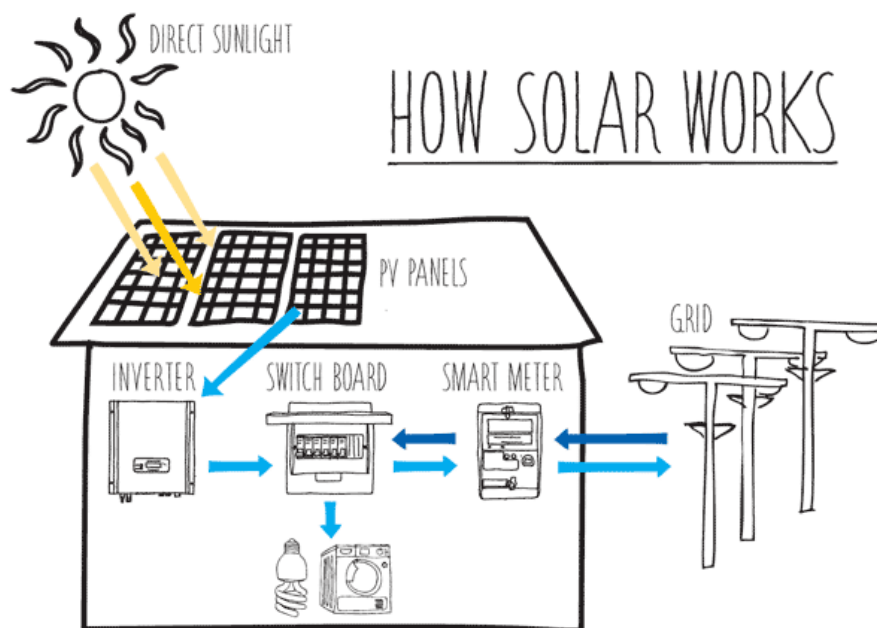
General information about solar power

Why go solar?

- By generating your own solar power, you'll be saving on your electricity bills.
- By installing clean energy you help keep our air clean and our climate safe.
- Council has set a target to double Darebin's solar energy generation over four years (by 2021) – so you're also helping us as a city to reach our local renewable energy goals.

How does solar power work?

- Solar panels on your roof convert energy from sunlight into direct current (DC) electricity, and the inverter then transforms the DC electricity into alternating current (AC), which is used in your house or exported to the grid.
- Whenever you produce more solar power than you're using in your home, the remainder is exported (sold) to the grid.
- Your smart meter records electricity being exported and imported to and from the grid, and you get credited on your bill for the electricity you export to the grid.
- The amount you get paid for your electricity exports is called the *feed-in tariff*. The minimum flat feed-in tariff is 12c (see also: [What is the feed-in-tariff? What will I see on my bills?](#)).
- Generally, you pay more for what you import than you get paid for what you export. This means that the more your daily power usage happens during the day, the more financial benefit you will get from solar.



You can find out more about solar on [our website](#).

Is my roof suitable for solar? Which orientation is best?

When you apply for one of our solar programs, our solar provider will first do a desktop assessment using satellite imagery to see whether solar is suitable for your roof.

While due North is the ideal orientation for maximum solar generation, West and East also work. While they are a little less efficient than North-facing, for most households it will still be very worthwhile. If you use most of your power in the afternoon, then West-facing panels may even be better for you.

You may also have heard that the angle of your roof is important. The optimum angle is 20–25 degrees, but slightly more or less shouldn't be a problem. If you have a flat roof, an adjustable tilt frame may be used to bring the panels up to the ideal angle.

If solar is a viable option for your house then an **obligation-free quote** will be arranged for you.

Will significant modifications need to be made to my home?

No. Solar PV systems are typically installed with minimal modification to the house. The frames for the solar panels are usually built onto your existing roof, and the cables run inside the roof and walls where possible. On a flat roof a special kind of mounting called a tilt-frame is needed, which will add to the cost but will not affect your roof.

For a tiled roof, some of the tiles are removed, brackets attached to the rafters in the roof, and then the tiles go back into place. It's good to have some spare roof tiles handy during installation because old tiles often become brittle and crack during installation. Often the recommendation is for 20-30 roof tiles to be purchased prior to installation day. For a tin roof it is easy to install solar, because the panels are installed directly onto the roof.

Are there any reasons why I might not be able to get solar?

Yes, unfortunately solar doesn't work for all properties. Some of the problems that can come up include the following.

- If your roof does not have enough clear, unshaded space to fit at least the smallest system we can offer then we won't be able to install a system for you.
- Your switchboard and wiring need to be up to standard and able to accommodate solar power safely. If your switchboard or wiring are old they may not be adequate and may need to be replaced before an installation can go ahead. This can be costly and may need to be paid by you (though not up-front, in the case of switchboard works), so you need to weigh up whether it is worth the benefit and whether you can afford it.
- If asbestos is present in your house and/or your switchboard, our installer may not be able to carry out the necessary works. You would need to pay for its removal prior to installation.

- If you are in a heritage area, and if your system would be visible from the street or a public park, you will need to apply for a planning permit. If this permit is not granted, we won't be able to go ahead with an installation.
- If your roof is made from decramastic roof sheets our installer may not be able to carry out the necessary works. This is a kind of pressed metal roof sheeting that is made to look like roof tiles.
- If your roof is very difficult to access safely then our installer may not be able to carry out the necessary works.
- If we determine that the financial benefit to you might be marginal, then we will let you know so you can make an informed decision.

Is my smart meter compatible with solar power?

Yes, all smart meters are compatible with rooftop solar systems. Smart meters monitor how much power you use from the electricity grid (import) and how much is sent back to the grid from your panels (export).

When your solar system is installed your Electricity Distributor Network (CitiPower, Jemena or AusNet) will reprogram your meter remotely so that the smart meter knows you have a solar system. There will be a small, one-off fee for this service – usually in the order of \$50-100, which will be added to your next electricity bill. If you are concerned about this fee please talk to us.

If you don't yet have a smart meter, you will need to arrange for this before the solar system can be switched on.

Do I need to clean or maintain the panels?

Manufacturers sometimes advise you to wipe the panels down with warm water perhaps once a year. This is because small collections of dust, dirt and bird droppings may affect the output – particularly if the pitch of your roof is less than 15 degrees. It's not likely to have a major impact in the short term, but build-up over time could reduce the effectiveness of the solar panel. If you don't feel confident about getting up on the roof, don't. Given that the impact is not likely to be great, you might choose not to clean the panels at all, or you might choose to pay someone to do it or ask a family member to help.

What happens in the event of a power failure?

If there is a black-out your solar power system will instantly and automatically shut off. This is Australian law and is designed to protect electrical line workers. When the grid power is shut off, the workers need the lines to be dead so they can safely repair faults.

How else can I make my house more energy efficient?

You can go to our website or Sustainability Victoria to learn ways to save electricity costs by making some simple changes at home. There are easy things to do like choosing cold water for your washing machine, fitting LED lights, or fitting draught

stoppers to your windows and doors. There are great resources available for people renting, seniors and advice for different times of year. Go to <https://www.energy.gov.au/household-guides/reduce-energy-bills>

You can also check out Darebin's website for more energy saving tips: <http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/en/Darebin-Living/Caring-for-the-environment/EnergyClimate#Saving-Energy>

Installing solar may require some changes to your daily routines to make the most of your day-time electricity generation. We will provide you with specific information prior to installation and afterwards.

What about batteries?

Many people are interested in batteries, however batteries are not yet as financially beneficial as solar panels alone. For this reason Council is recommending that you install solar power now, so you can start getting the benefits, rather than waiting for battery prices to drop.

Are batteries included in the Darebin solar programs?

Solar Saver: No

Through the **Solar Saver** program **Council pays the upfront cost** of your solar system, and you pay it back slowly over 10 years. Batteries are not included in the Solar Saver program. However, if you choose to purchase your own separately, the solar systems that are available through our program are designed for batteries to be able to be retrofitted.

Bulk Buy: Yes, if you can afford upfront payment

Through the **Bulk Buy** program **you pay the entire upfront cost** of the solar system. Through this program you can negotiate a battery **at extra cost**. Though you pay for the entire system upfront, you still get the other benefits of participating in a Council program.

Why don't you include batteries in the Solar Saver program?

Council's main aim in funding the Solar Saver program is to increase the amount of renewable energy *generated* in Darebin, not the amount of renewable energy *stored* in Darebin, and to make solar power accessible to as many residents as possible. Money spent on battery storage would reduce the amount of money available to install solar panels. We also want to make sure you are getting the financial benefits of solar, and currently batteries have a long pay-back period – often longer than the warranties on your system.

Are batteries worth the cost? What is the payback period?

At this stage batteries are still very expensive. A typical medium-large solar system might cost around \$5,000. But a battery on top of the solar system, can cost around \$10,000 extra, so a total of say \$15,000.

While a grid connected solar system will typically pay for itself in 3-5 years, a battery will take 10-15 years. Given that most batteries only carry a 10 year warranty, if they fail just after 10 years there may be no net financial benefit.

What are the benefits of solar batteries?

Going off the grid

Historically people would mainly install solar batteries in cases where getting their home connected to the grid was very expensive. Some remote and rural properties could pay more than \$50,000 for grid connection, in which case solar and batteries were a cheaper option. Some people also chose to be off-the-grid because they prefer the independence, even if it's not a cheaper option.

Saving money

Most people are not home to use the power that their solar system is generating during the day. By installing a battery, you can save what your solar system produces during the day, and use it in the evening and morning.

This saves you money because you pay more for the power that you buy from the grid in the morning or evening than what you get paid for the power that you export back to the grid during the day when you're not home to use it.

Have power in your home during a blackout

Solar systems disconnect from the grid in the event of a blackout so that people working on the power lines to restore power aren't electrocuted by power coming out of your home's solar system.

Many battery systems can disconnect from the grid while still supplying power to your home in the event of a blackout. Not all battery systems will do this, so you need to check with the supplier.

Landlords, renters and owners' corporations.

What are the benefits of Solar Saver for landlords?

The potential benefits of installing solar on a property that you rent out to tenants include:

- Increased property value
- Increased attractiveness as a rental property (which may lead to longer tenancies, higher rent, and a higher occupancy rate)
- Ownership of the asset after paying it off

- Contributing to increasing local clean energy.

The additional benefits of the **Darebin Solar Saver** program are that:

- Council pays the upfront cost for the system, and you pay it off over ten years, interest free.
- If you are renting out your property and you choose to install a solar system through Solar Saver, your Special Charge repayments are considered to be a capital expense. As a loan repayment you can't claim this as an income deduction against the rental income from the property. The solar system is considered to be a depreciating asset for income tax purposes. Provided the solar system is part of the rental property, the purchase price is treated as the 'cost' of the solar system for income tax purposes. A part of that cost can be claimed yearly as a tax deduction over its effective life (Division 40 of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997).
- Taxation Ruling TR 2017/2 Income tax: effective life of depreciating assets provides a table listing the effective life of depreciating assets. In accordance with TR 2017/2 the effective life of solar power generating system assets is twenty years.
- Further information on depreciating assets is available on the ATO's website, www.ato.gov.au by inserting 'QC 51237' into the website's search function.
- This is general information only, so you should seek individual advice from your tax accountant about your specific circumstances.

Do landlords need permission from tenants?

Council can form a legal agreement only with the ratepayer. For a rental property, the ratepayer is the owner (landlord).

Council wants to make the benefits of solar accessible to everyone, including renters and landlords. It's also important for Council to do everything it can to ensure that renters are not disadvantaged in any way by the installation of a solar system on their home through this program.

For this and other reasons:

- If you are a landlord who wants to install solar on a property you rent out, you need your tenant to sign a written agreement indicating that:
 - They consent to the installation of a solar system through this program
 - They will provide safe access to the property for the installation
 - They will pay the connection fees and complete any paperwork required by their electricity retailer to connect the system to the grid.
- This written consent forms part of your agreement with Council.
- We inform tenants who apply independently that:
 - Their landlord will have to sign the agreement.

- Landlords are limited in how they increase rent.
- In the meantime if they feel they are being asked to pay an excessive increase in rent, they can ask Consumer Affairs Victoria to assess the fairness of the situation:
<https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/housing/renting/during-a-lease-or-residency/rent-and-other-payments/rent-increases>

I am a renter / tenant, can I participate?

- Yes, but you will need permission from the owner (or ratepayer) of the property. The owner (or ratepayer) will need to sign an agreement with Council to make the additional Special Charge payment applicable to the Solar Saver program.
- We can help you with the discussion with your landlord.
- If you are in social housing please let us know. We may be able to work with your housing provider.
- If you are public housing we won't be able to include you in this round but we will keep you posted if that changes.

What if I live in a flat/unit/apartment with a shared roof?

- If you live in a semi-detached house that has its own roof space, even if you may share a wall with a neighbor, then these points do not apply to you.
- For many apartment buildings, flats and units, your roof is part of what is called a *common area*. Each property has equal share to the roof space.
- If your roof is a shared space you will need permission from your Owners' Corporation.
- We recommend that you get this permission in writing, and that you forward this to us to keep with your records (however that is not a requirement to participate in the program).
- There may not be enough space for each and every apartment to install solar PV panels.
- Solar power systems cannot be shared across separate apartments because they need to feed into a single smart meter. Individual solar systems are required for each apartment.

We recommend you start a conversation with your neighbours as soon as possible. We can help you with this. Some advice on talking to your Owners' Corporation:

- Ask to put solar on the agenda at your next Owners' Corporation meeting.
- Think about how you can communicate with other owners before the meeting – do you have a group Facebook page, an email list, or phone number for your fellow owners? Or could you put up a notice on a noticeboard or drop a note into their letterboxes? If you need help with this, please ask us – we can provide a template or point you to appropriate materials. This FAQ could be a good start.

- If you don't already attend Owners' Corporation meetings, find out how many owners usually take interest and what quorum is (how many people do they need to attend to make a decision)?
- Let your neighbours and/or other owners know that there is an opportunity for them to access solar through our programs – share our website with them www.darebin.vic.gov.au/solar
- If you want to read more about sustainability for multi-residential buildings check out [these resources from the City of Melbourne](#).
- If you need help, please ask us.

Who do I contact with further questions?

Please get in touch with us via phone or email if you have any further questions, we're here to help you!

Phone: 03 8470 8389

Email: solar@darebin.vic.gov.au

Web: darebin.vic.gov.au

Or for general Council enquiries please call Customer Service on 03 8470 8888.

GLOSSARY

Distributor = the company that is responsible for distributing energy and maintaining the powerlines and poles that carry your electricity. There are three in Darebin: AusNet, Jemena and CitiPower.

FIT = Feed-In Tariff = the money you get paid when you feed excess energy back into the grid. Currently the minimum FIT in Victoria is 11.3 cents per kilowatt hour. This about to change – [see Question 25](#).

Inverter = the machine that converts the energy collected by your panels into energy you can use in your house.

kW(hr) = kilowatt (hour) = unit of measure for electricity consumption (per hour).

NMI = National Meter Identifier = a unique number that identifies your home or business for the purpose of electricity billing. You can find your NMI on any electricity bill.

Pitch = angle (of your roof) – this affects your solar panels because they need to be on a particular angle to the sun to be most efficient (can be adjusted by using special mounts).

PV, Solar PV = (Solar) Photo Voltaic (Panels) = Solar Panels.

Retailer = the company that sells you electricity (eg Origin, AGL, TruEnergy, Powershop, Diamond Energy etc etc).

Smart Meter = the device that records your electricity use. This is how your power company (retailer) knows how much to charge you. It also tells them how much energy you are putting back into the grid.

Special Charge Scheme = a mechanism that allows Council to buy your solar system upfront and you to pay back the cost over time. The way this works is that Council will charge you a small additional payment (a Special Charge) on your quarterly rates notice. You can repay the loan over up to 40 instalments over up to 10 years in this way.