



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:
(202) 586-4940

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Net Metering Contest Pushes Homes to Achieve Zero-Energy at Department of Energy's Solar Decathlon

WASHINGTON, DC – There's a new contest this year at the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Decathlon, and it may help show the way for homeowners to turn back the costs of their electric bills.

The Net Metering contest adds an entirely new dimension to the challenge, as homes are connected to a grid to measure how well they produce or consume power.

“In today's sophisticated energy grid, houses that use solar power can feed energy back into the power grid, eliminating the need for costly battery storage systems,” said Richard King, director of the Solar Decathlon, who is with the Energy Department. “Imagine receiving a zero bill for electricity. These Solar Decathlon homes are showing us the way today.”

The Net Metering contest mirrors a typical residential solar set up. With net metering, homeowners can generate their own renewable electricity – through solar power – to actually sell back to the utility. When a home is generating more electricity than it is consuming, the excess power can be sold to the grid. When the home needs more energy than it is generating, it is purchased from the utility. Net metering is already available from some utilities.

Currently, twenty university-led teams from the United States, Canada, Germany, and Spain are competing in DOE's fourth Solar Decathlon to design, build, and operate houses powered entirely by the sun. The event, held on the National Mall, concludes Friday when an overall winner will be announced at 8:00am in the Solar Village.

Teams are competing in ten areas that evaluate several aspects of a home's appearance, such as architecture, market viability, and comfort, and that measure the way it optimizes efficiency and provides energy for space heating and cooling, hot water, home entertainment, lighting, and appliances.

The Solar Decathlon's Net Metering contest, worth up to 150 points – the most in the competition – is measured in two parts:

Energy Balance – Teams receive 100 points for producing at least as much energy as the house needs, thus achieving a net-zero energy consumption during the contest week. Teams have worked hard to balance production and consumption. At the end of competition week, when competition officials read the home’s electrical meter, it must be zero or less for the team to receive 100 points.

Energy Surplus – Solar Decathlon teams can receive up to 50 additional points for producing surplus energy over and above what they use during the contest week. When a team generates surplus energy, the home’s electrical meter turns backward past the net zero point to indicate a negative reading.

The ten contests that make up the Solar Decathlon measure many aspects of a home’s performance and appearance. A perfect total score for all ten contests in the Solar Decathlon is 1,000 points. Five of them – Architecture, Communications, Engineering, Lighting Design, and Market Viability – are scored subjectively. Others, including Appliances, Comfort Zone, Home Entertainment, Hot Water, and Net Metering, accumulate points daily and will not be tallied up until the end of the competition.

Held on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the Department of Energy Solar Decathlon is open to the public through Sunday, October 18. The houses are open for tours weekdays from 11:00am to 3:00pm and weekends 10:00am to 5:00pm.

Commercial sponsors of the DOE Solar Decathlon include Applied Materials, BP, Pepco, and Schneider Electric.

For full event information, current standings, high-resolution photos and videos, an event schedule, and daily results, visit www.solardecathlon.org.

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