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Hawaiian Electric speeds savings for rooftop solar customers

Company working with PUC, solar industry to streamline processes

HONOLULU, May 21, 2020 – Hawaiian Electric has worked with the solar industry and regulators to cut by nearly half the time from application to activation of a new private rooftop solar system – saving about two months. This and other improvements aim to let customers reap the financial benefits of solar sooner and boost the solar industry as a vital part of the state's economic recovery.

The Public Utilities Commission's leadership brought Hawaiian Electric and the solar industry together to discuss meaningful action to quickly produce improvements during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Among the improvements:

- Customer systems smaller than 25 kilowatts with proper activated protective equipment can now turn on as soon as the building permit closes.
- When an application is conditionally approved, Hawaiian Electric will start the meter change process. Previously, the meter was changed after final approval. Solar contractors are being asked to help prioritize these new meter installations.
- Contractors may now install a temporary second meter for new Customer Grid Supply+ customers instead of awaiting the permanent meter installation. The utility will later install a permanent meter to complete the system.
- The company is working on ways to expedite the process for rooftop solar customers who are also upgrading their electricity connection as a part of their installation.

"We'll continue to look for ways to smooth and speed up the application process, in consultation with the PUC and solar contractors," said Lani Shinsato, Hawaiian Electric Customer Energy Resources co-director. "We'll also review changes in six months to make sure they are effective in helping our customers go solar more easily and support the solar industry."

Hawaiian Electric is also asking solar contractors to help speed the process by starting early to get necessary county building permits; making sure applications and other requirements are completed fully and accurately so they do not need to be resubmitted; and helping educate customers about what is needed from them and when.

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These changes are in effect immediately and Hawaiian Electric is asking contractors and customers to be patient as these changes are made while adhering to safety protocols during the current crisis.

“We understand we all need time to get used to the ‘new normal,’ especially with regard to our online Customer Interconnection Tool, which has been upgraded but may not reflect these new processes,” Shinsato said. “As these processes mature and we get a feel for their permanence, we will update the online tool.”

Hawaiian Electric is a national leader in integration of private rooftop solar, with systems on about a third of single-family homes on O‘ahu and about 20 percent of homes across the five islands it serves.

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