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## Akeena Solar - Blog

The Akeena Solar blog provides views on all things solar: energy legislation, industry trends, installation stories, customer views, new technologies, and more!



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*May 04, 2010*

### Is Solar a Commodity?

As awareness of solar power grows, and more and more installers spring up around the country, how will consumers base their solar purchase decisions in an exploding market? Will solar become a mere commodity, with customers rushing the lowest bidder, or will sales be driven by the customer experience and quality associated with a given brand?

When consumers become motivated primarily by numbers, whether they be related to fat grams, miles-per-gallon, or price, does brand become insignificant—or a deciding factor?

With competition heating up, manufacturers are going to be forced to reconsider the way they manufacture, distribute, and install product in order to remain competitive in the eyes of the consumer. Given this “commodity” environment, will the quality of solar panels drop industry-wide?

If you ask any potential solar power customer what the differences are between the offerings of Company X, Company Y, and Company Z, you would probably be told which company's product is the most or least expensive, period.

In five years, go back to that same customer and ask about the three offerings they considered when making their solar purchase. Having lived with their system for a while, you will likely hear more about quality and brand.

The upshot here is that, in today's (and tomorrow's) solar energy marketplace, whether customers know it yet or not, brand does matter. And given that, what should savvy consumers be thinking about?

- Innovation: If a manufacturer is offering rock-bottom prices, but 1970s technology, keep shopping.
- Customization: One Size Does Not Fit All when it comes to solar. Lot orientation, roof pitch, landscaping, and many other factors dictate how a solar power system should be mounted. Your expert installer needs to know this.
- Customer Care: Don't use a solar installer that only wants to install. Get what you pay for, and that means full-service assistance in permitting, design, and government rebate paperwork.
- Warranties: Solar systems are supposed to be built to last for around 30 years, but if they don't, you need to make sure your installer offers warranties on both panels and inverters so that your investment is protected.

Want to learn more about Akeena Solar? Join our community on [Facebook](#).

*Apr 22, 2010*

## **Earth Day**

Today is Earth Day, and for many of us, this day marks an opportunity to think about ways to help take better care of our planet and its resources. Sort of like making a New Year's resolution—but the stakes are global, and infinitely higher.

Obviously, going solar makes a large impact on this effort, and it's a trend that is catching on all over the country. According to a study conducted by The Solar Energy Industries Association, American homes generated twice as much power from rooftop solar panels in 2009 than in 2008.

Now that the government has lifted the \$2,000 cap on tax credits for residential solar panels, homeowners can deduct a full 30% of their costs of going solar at tax time. With this new savings incentive, it's expected that more and more people will be opting in to solar in 2010.

As we stand on the edge of a solar power boom, the industry landscape will be growing more and more crowded, and the marketing noise will be rising. So when it comes to buying a solar power system, who do you trust?

Right now, there is no "Microsoft of the solar industry," so many consumers are left to their own devices when choosing an installer. With no readily available guidelines, many potential customers become overwhelmed, and their quest for solar becomes stalled indefinitely.

Founded in 2001, Akeena Solar is the country's most trusted solar installer, with thousands of satisfied customers throughout the United States. We've taken the lead in developing the next generation of solar technologies with our Andalay panels, which set a new industry standard for error-free installation and robust, unparalleled performance.

Our commitment to complete customer service and satisfaction begins with a free, no-obligation Solar Evaluation, and continues as our engineers design a custom installation plan, and our project managers coordinate all of the paperwork for permits, hookup, rebates, and incentives.

So if you're considering a move to solar this Earth Day, I hope you'll think about Akeena. We're helping America get greener, one home at a time. To find out if solar is right for your home, just [request a free Solar Evaluation](#).

Follow us on Twitter [@Akeena\\_Solar!](#)

*Apr 12, 2010*

## **Putting America Back to Work, One Solar Panel at a Time**

It's no secret that the US, like many other countries right now, is in desperate need of new jobs for the unemployed. The President is acutely aware of this, and enacting legislation that will create jobs for millions of Americans is one of the primary missions of the current administration.

President Obama's energy plan calls for a \$150 billion investment in clean technologies over 10 years, aggressive targets for greenhouse emission reductions, and programs to promote energy efficiency, low-carbon bio-fuels, and renewable energies.

The state of California has been at the forefront of the clean tech movement from the very beginning. Of the \$3.95 billion in US venture capital received in 2007 by companies producing eco-friendly products and services, California garnered \$1.79 billion. And most of those investments were directed toward companies in Silicon Valley, where the excitement and innovation around solar, wind, and hydro power is reminiscent of the early years of the technology industry.

California—and Silicon Valley in particular—has become a leader in clean tech because of the State's longstanding support for alternative energy. Clean tech growth and the new jobs created by this revolution are at risk if legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is repealed. Historically, environmental protection and economic growth go hand in hand, and studies have shown that energy efficiency measures and renewable energy standards would help to create the jobs that will contribute significantly to California's economic recovery.

Lowering or removing the renewable energy standards will significantly slow demand for clean tech products and services, diminish the resources of alternative energy innovators, and reduce the growth of the companies at the forefront of the industry. And that means fewer jobs created in a state that desperately needs to put its people back to work.

Now where's the sense in that?

*Apr 01, 2010*

## A Single Step

According to the US Department of the Interior, the desert areas of the southwestern states alone have the potential to be able to meet the electricity needs of the entire United States through solar energy. That's pretty amazing information, isn't it?

Hollywood, New York, and Las Vegas are considered the entertainment capitals of the country, and Silicon Valley and Seattle are hotbeds of technology innovation. Wouldn't it be great if Arizona, Nevada, and Southern California could take up the mantle to become the solar energy center of the country?

Research states that if all of the solar radiation in this geographic area were converted to electricity, that could actually become a reality. The ability to offset so much energy usage by leveraging a relatively small portion of land is mind-boggling.

But of course we know that such an undertaking would require years of planning, negotiation, and legislation. And while we wait for that to become a reality, it's important to remember that any long journey begins with just a single step. And the steps we take today to take our dependencies away from the grid and change the way we power our homes and businesses by switching to solar bring us closer and closer to the day when we can, as a country, change the way the world thinks about energy.

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*Mar 18, 2010*

## The Care and Feeding of Your Solar Power System

Now that spring is in the air, the weather is warming, and the sun is getting ready for its busy season, let's talk about the best ways to make sure your solar system is always in great working order.

Most solar systems are installed on rooftops, out of sight. And because they have no moving parts that grind, squeak, and attract attention to themselves, it's easy to forget they're even up there. But in order to keep enjoying the tremendous energy and cost savings you're getting from solar, your system needs a semi-annual cleaning—especially if you are located in an area that is particularly dry and dusty.

**1. Safety First** - The first thing to be aware of when cleaning your solar panels is always safety. Make sure any ladder you are using to access rooftop panels is stable, and work with a partner if you can. If you're uncomfortable with heights, definitely consider hiring a professional service to perform regular cleanings.

**2. Hope Floats, But Glass Cracks** - Remember to avoid walking or standing on the panels while cleaning them. Although the tempered glass surface of the modules is extremely strong, the panels will break if you walk on them, and must be replaced if damaged.

**3. Don't Get Sappy** - For average dust accumulations, you can simply hose the modules off. Also check for accumulations of tree sap or bird droppings, and clean them off with a sponge or squeegee using a mild dish soap and water solution.

**4. Branch Out (and Off)!** - Also make sure to clean leaves, branches, and other debris off the top of the modules, and remove any material that may have become lodged under the modules, as it could reduce cooling airflow, or cause water to back up in a severe rainstorm.

Just as you do for your home and your car, it's important to keep your solar power system well maintained in order to get the most value from your investment. A quick cleaning a couple of times a year will keep your system cranking out that solar goodness for years to come!

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*Mar 10, 2010*

## **The Facts of Life (As They Apply to Better Performing, More Reliable Solar Power, of course)**

We've already talked about how improved installation methods dramatically affect the value of your solar investment. Now, I'm going to give you just a few last facts on performance, safety and reliability:

### **FACT #1: Andalay AC Solar Panels improve system performance:**

1. Panels connect directly into your home electricity meter, eliminating the need for the system to convert current from DC to AC
2. Each panel within the system maximizes its output—even in shade—for better productivity

### **FACT #2: Andalay's integrated mounting and fully grounded systems reduce or eliminate safety issues:**

1. Shorter wiring runs reduce system wear
2. Panels connected structurally reduce safety issues significantly
3. The mounting pans serve as a redundant ground path for all adjacent modules

### **FACT #3: Andalay's factory-assembled systems provide better reliability:**

1. Panel-to-panel electrical locking connectors provide higher overall system reliability and safety
2. Self-tightening connection rods eliminate exposed wires and pinched electrical joints

So there you have it. You probably haven't thought this much about electricity since high school science class, have you? But when you are considering in a long-term investment like solar energy, it pays to understand how new advances have improved safety, productivity, and reliability — and how it will protect your investment.

If you want to learn more about Akeena's revolutionary new approach to solar, become a fan on our [Facebook page](#) and get all the latest news and updates and communicate directly with Akeena staff!

*Mar 04, 2010*

## **Improved Reliability Delivers a Better Investment**

Until Akeena introduced Andalay solar panels, there hadn't been an update in solar energy system design and installation for over 30 years. As the demand for solar power systems increased, the need to address longstanding design weaknesses that impacted reliability was becoming critical.

Andalay addresses the design weaknesses in traditional solar panels by incorporating the entire electrical system into

the overall framing infrastructure. This way, the solar panel acts as a part of the rack mounting system itself, replacing unnecessary rails and enabling these components to be manufactured in a factory setting for better quality control. Having all the electrical and grounding connections pre-assembled at the factory means that the product more closely resembles a finished installation—*before* it's mounted on a roof!

This installation methodology, while simplifying installation and reducing rooftop labor and rooftop assembled parts, produces a much safer product. The overall result is faster, smoother, more consistent installations that deliver dramatically higher long-term reliability. And the bonus for homeowners is that there are far fewer holes in your roof and less chance for leaks!

The other key consumer benefit from this new design is more robust grounding. By using a primary grounding path through double-ended, threaded splice rods that bolt together adjacent panels, grounding is substantially better than with ordinary wire. Because the ground path is contiguous, all grounding is automatic among the components as the frame and roof mount components are being assembled.

The final part of the grounding is to attach a ground strap from the frame to the final ground point, which completes the grounding for every piece of the panel and mounting system with redundancy built-in for extra reliability. Wires will break in traditional mounting systems, guaranteed, it is only a matter of time before the weather or a squirrel gets to it first!

Simply stated, Andalay is the future of solar power. The award-winning technology outperforms ordinary solar panels on cloudy days and in shady areas. Andalay also delivers a massive improvement in reliability that protects the value of your investment. Oh, yeah, and it looks great, too!

Check back next time, when I'll be talking about the facts of life. . .solar life, that is. ;)

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*Feb 18, 2010*

## **Traditional Solar System Installation: There's Gotta Be A Better Way!**

Traditional roof assembly processes are cumbersome and complex — and as too many have discovered, the end result is only as effective as the installer's skills! With continued growth, the industry is seeing significant limitations in ordinary panels that can lead to problems that can impact reliability, safety, and industry reputation overall.

The accepted process for rooftop solar installations has remained essentially unchanged since solar systems were first put into use in the 1970s. It included site design, development of a parts inventory, assembly of the parts and tools, transfer of equipment to the roof, identification of rooftop anchoring points, bolting in roof brackets, and attaching aluminum racks to the brackets.

And all of this happens *before* any actual panel installation takes place!

Once all of this is completed, solar panels are attached to the racks via a clamping system, with the power and grounding wiring affixed to each panel separately. This multi-step, tiered approach to solar power system installation significantly impacts the safety and effectiveness of a system. The wiring becomes its own intricate, labor- and time-intensive process, and the potential for problems is high. Product and service quality is challenged further by the fact that all this detailed work is being done up on a roof, in all kinds of weather conditions.

The best way to eliminate these inefficiencies is through development of a design and assembly methodology that

can be replicated easily across many different installations. Better overall assembly, electrical connection, and grounding design and processes are borne from robust product designs that provide simplified, consistently high-quality installations.

Hopefully all of this hasn't put you off the idea of installing a solar power system, because in my next post, I'm going to let you in on a revolutionary way to install solar systems that dramatically reduces reliability and safety issues, and roof damage.

Sound good? Stay tuned!