

MiSustainable Holland

About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

Smart Energy: We need to use both conservation and efficiency measures to manage our resources to provide access to reliable and cost-effective energy.

Holland BPW introduces Solar Calculator for informed sustainable energy decisions

By Andrew Reynolds and Jennifer Soukhome
Holland Board of Public Works

Holland Board of Public Works has launched a new online Solar Calculator to help its residential electric customers decide whether to go solar.

Solar power is becoming increasingly popular as homeowners seek sustainable, cost-effective energy solutions. Before deciding to invest in solar panels, it's important to know how much they cost, the potential savings, and how they impact the environment.

To help decide all that, the new calculator is accessible at hollandbpw.com/en/solar-calculator.

The calculator requires that you to input basic details about your property and its location, as well as your average monthly electric bill. With this information, it generates a suggested solar array size and how much it would cost to install, and it calculates the payback period for the project. It can also factor in things like battery systems and federal tax credits.

Users can see the anticipated savings on electric bills over time based on Holland BPW's electric rates, which also reflects the charges customers would continue to pay to be connected to the grid and buy electricity when they still need it.

For those who like the idea of reducing their carbon footprint but are hesitant about the upfront cost of solar panels, customers can opt for Holland BPW's Elective Renewable Rate. Currently, around 15 percent of the energy supplied by Holland BPW to customers comes from renewable sources.

By paying an additional one cent per kilowatt-hour, homeowners can ensure that all the electricity consumed by their residence is from renewable sources. This usually comes out to an extra \$5 to \$10 per month or much less than the cost of solar panels. Visit hollandbpw.com/elective-renewable-energy for more information.

Each energy source, whether it is solar, wind, or conventional fossil fuels, has an impact on the environment at some point in its life cycle. While going solar does reduce your electricity bills and carbon footprint, it is essential to acknowledge that solar energy isn't entirely pollution-free.

Although solar panels don't emit harmful air pollutants during operation, their production and disposal carry environmental impacts. The extraction of metals for solar panel production involves mining, and currently, most panels ultimately end up in landfills at the end of their lifecycle.

That's one reason why it's important to address your home's overall energy efficiency before considering adding solar. If you can reduce your home's unnecessary electric demands, you will reduce your bills and associated emissions whether or not you decide to pursue solar.

But if you do ultimately decide to install solar, you can install a smaller system than you would have needed otherwise. Use Holland BPW's energy waste reduction programs and new solar calculator to make and implement a plan that works for you.

- *Andrew Reynolds is the community energy services manager and Jennifer Soukhome is the residential community energy services specialist at Holland Board of Works.*