

Solar Permit Information

Small-scale renewable energy benefits California communities. It increases energy reliability for residents and businesses by generating electricity near where it is consumed. This type of energy can also provide stable electricity prices for consumers and creates thousands of jobs across California.



California's state building codes provide uniform requirements for buildings throughout the state. These requirements are contained in Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR). These regulations are also known as the state's "building standards." Title 24 applies to all building occupancies and related features and equipment throughout the state. It contains requirements for a building's structural, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, in addition to measures for energy conservation, sustainable construction, maintenance, fire and life safety, and accessibility.

A common misunderstanding is that Title 24 relates only to energy conservation. In fact, it covers a much wider range of requirements for buildings. Specific areas within Title 24 identify certain requirements for solar PV installations such as the California Electrical Code, the California Building Code, and the California Residential Code (which applies to residential buildings of one or two units). State regulations should not be confused with state laws enacted through the legislative process. State regulations are adopted by state agencies where necessary to implement, clarify, and specify requirements of state law. The California Building Standards Commission and the other state adopting agencies review the codes, and update Title 24 as appropriate. Title 24 is updated every three years.

Several portions of Title 24 govern installation of a solar PV system:

- California Building Code, Title 24, Part 2
- California Residential Code, Title 24, Part 2.5 (One- and Two-family dwellings)
- California Electrical Code, Title 24, Part 3 California Energy Code, Title 24, Part 6
- California Fire Code, Title 24, Part 9.

While current, Title 24 requirements establish several legal standards for installation of solar PV installations. Title 24 may be amended through the state's code update process to further clarify requirements for solar PV installations. Updated information regarding new code requirements, as well as the code updating process, is available on the California Building Standards website.

PLANNING AND ZONING REQUIREMENTS

The City of Lakeport enforces the General Plan and the Municipal Code that guides development in our community, and adopts local ordinances and zoning regulations to enforce them. A more detailed conversation regarding land use and zoning for solar projects can be made with the City of Lakeport Planning Division.

CEQA Exemption for Certain Solar Installations Senate Bill 226, passed in 2011, is a state law establishing that certain solar energy systems are exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). To qualify under this statutory exemption, a solar energy project must be located on the roof of either an existing building or on an existing parking lot. SB 226 makes clear the legislative intent that rooftop and parking lot solar projects do not require in-depth environmental review. This CEQA exemption is contained in Section 21080.35 of the Public Resources Code.

Securing approval for a solar PV project involves several basic steps.

First a permit application is submitted and reviewed by Building Division. Typically, a permit is submitted on behalf of a building owner by the contractor installing the solar PV system.

Once the permit application is approved, the applicant has permission to build the solar installation. After the solar installation is constructed, it is inspected by the City's Building Inspector, to ensure it complies with applicable building codes and local ordinances.

While securing project approval from the building division, the permit applicant should contact PG&E to request permission to connect the solar installation to the local distribution grid. The solar system cannot be "turned on" until approval is granted by both the Building Division and PG&E. Well-informed solar installers and knowledgeable, well-trained local agency staff are critical to achieve an efficient permit approval process.

All solar installations need PG&E's approval to link into the electricity grid, a process commonly referred to as "interconnection." This interconnection approval must be granted before a solar PV installation is allowed to operate and is completely separate from the Building Division approval for the solar installation. Interconnection approval ensures that a solar installation will safely connect and operate on the electricity grid.

Understanding the utility's requirements and process is very important. Permit applicants should contact PG&E at the beginning of the project planning stage. They can provide information about required interconnection agreements and can also provide information about available financial rebates or incentives. A permit applicant may also apply to the PG&E for incentives available for new solar systems under the California Solar Initiative. To qualify for rebates or other incentives, property owners may be required to complete an energy audit before installing a PV system.