

# Solar festival challenges residents to think 'green'

As part of their effort to bring more energy alternatives to Broward County, organizers of the Go Solar Rooftop Solar Challenge will be hosting Go Solar Fest to help educate and encourage homeowners and small businesses to convert to renewable energy.

Go Solar Fest is part of Broward County's Go Solar Rooftop Solar Challenge, which was created to increase solar power in the county by streamlining and simplifying the permit process.

"We want to use it as an opportunity to market the whole concept of solar and encourage people to think about going solar in their homes," said Jeff Halsey, director of Broward County's Pollution Preven-

tion, Remediation and Air Quality Division.

During Go Solar Fest, participants can learn about how solar power works and also find out about contractors, financing options for rooftop installation, permit requirements, insurance, homeowners' rights and local zoning ordinances.

Admission and parking are free, but pre-registration is required. Go Solar Fest will take place from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Jan. 25 and from 9 a.m. to noon Jan. 26 at the Broward County Convention Center, 1950 Eisenhower Blvd. in Fort Lauderdale.

The county was able to implement its Go Solar Rooftop Solar Challenge after receiving a grant from

the U.S. Department of Energy to reduce the cost and the time it takes for residents and businesses to install solar panels. Applying for solar panel installation permits can be challenging for Broward County resident and businesses, because the cost and duration of the process can vary from one location to the next.

The grant was used to create one permitting system for the county and to implement a website at which residents can submit plans and receive approval. Broward was the only county in Florida to receive the grant.

Cities that will partner with the county on the grant program include Coconut Creek, Dania

Beach, Davie, Deerfield Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Hallandale Beach, Hillsboro Beach, Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, Miramar, North Lauderdale, Oakland Park, Pompano Beach, Sunrise and Tamarac. The website is expected to go live in the next few weeks.

According to the Department of Energy, 30 to 40 percent of the costs involved in the installation of solar technology involve expenses other than equipment, such as permitting, designing and maintenance. By streamlining the process and reducing the costs, officials hope to entice more residents and businesses to consider energy upgrades over the next few years.

"There's only going to

be one flat permit fee, so whoever wants to install these systems knows exactly what they pay, and after answering questions and selecting the system they want to install, they can be issued a permit and move forward installing the system," Halsey said.

While homeowners are permitted to install solar panels on their rooftops, condo owners don't have the same rights.

Condo owners who wish to install energy-efficient upgrades are limited because they're not permitted to make adjustments that affect the building itself or its common elements.

"By law, you cannot prohibit someone from making energy upgrades to their house or individual

property, but condos don't fall under that [mandate]," said attorney Lisa Magill of Becker & Poliakoff P.A., which specializes in condo and community association law. "There are not a lot of options for individual condo owners."

Typically, Magill said, condo residents who wish to upgrade in-house appliances don't need permission from their condo board to do so. However, owners who want to tint their windows or use window caulking to help improve insulation may need to get approval because of appearance issues with the building.

For information, visit [www.broward.org/go-green](http://www.broward.org/go-green) or call 954-519-1260.