

Home energy monitors getting wise to solar

Martin LaMonica
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SAN DIEGO--Two very different companies are developing ways to track energy usage in homes equipped with solar panels.

SolarCity, a company that leases solar panels to households, introduced on Wednesday a new version of its SolarGuard software that displays panels' production alongside a home's electricity usage.

In many states, people pay a higher rate for electricity during peak times in the middle of the day and early evening. By tracking usage--and solar panels' production--people can decide to run a washing machine at night, for example.

"The biggest energy-efficiency challenge in every house is not changing light bulbs. It's changing behavior," SolarCity CEO Lyndon Rive said.

Foster City, Calif.-based [SolarCity](#), like other solar installers, uses the Web monitoring system to ensure that there isn't a drop in panels' performance. Consumers get access to the energy usage application as part of their leasing program, Rive said.

Meanwhile, [Open Energy](#), a Solana Beach, Calif.-based solar panel maker, is in the midst of developing a dedicated touch-screen device for tracking solar panel and home energy usage.

There are already in-home displays that show a home's energy usage at a given moment. But most of them simply display the electricity meter and can't show whether a home's panels are producing more electricity than the home is using at a given moment.

Open Energy's device, which has a wireless Zigbee connection to an Internet gateway, can show solar panel production alongside electricity usage. It can also pull in gas and water usage, said company product manager Mark Bettis.

The product is set to be released next year and will cost between \$1,100 and \$1,400, which includes five years of solar panel monitoring.

"People need to know whether they are getting their money's worth out of the solar panels," he said.

On Wednesday, **Open Energy** also introduced a roofing tile with a solar cell embedded in it.

The companies made their announcements at this week's [Solar Power International conference](#) here.
