



Meeting to inform Morgantown residents about solar co-ops

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By Cynthia McCloud **CONNECT**

Homeowners and business people can learn more about affordably converting to solar energy at an informational meeting from 6-7:30 p.m. Feb. 19 at the Morgantown Public Library, located at 373 Spruce St., Meeting Room A.

The free meeting, which is open to the public, is one of the "Green Nights at the Library," discussions of green topics sponsored by the Morgantown Municipal Green Team, a group of citizens that advises the City of Morgantown on matters relating to sustainability in public policy, planning, education, departmental management, development, and evaluation of environmental and energy-related issues.

Among the speakers will be residents of Fayette and Monroe counties who have formed solar cooperatives to save money by buying a large order of solar panels together.

Emily Stiever of the nonprofit organization, WV SUN, a network of solar supporters in the state, will also be on hand to answer questions.

"The main benefit for folks of being part of a cooperative is they are able to go solar with their neighbors and have support throughout the process," Stiever said. "It has been around for a while but it's still a new technology. It can feel scary to put panels on your roof and spend money."

She said WV SUN and other groups support the cooperatives through the process of selecting an installer, reviewing proposals and signing contracts.

"The other benefit is cost savings," Stiever said. "We tend to get a 20 to 30 percent savings bulk discount from the installer, making it more affordable since there aren't any state incentives."

Residents who install solar-electric systems can get a 30-percent federal income tax credit.

That's to say nothing of the savings reflected in their monthly energy bills.

Pamela Cubberly, a Green Team member, said environmental consulting firm Downstream Strategies found the average home in a survey of 10 diverse types of houses in different neighborhoods had the potential to generate about 520 kWh of electricity each month.

Joey James, staff scientist Downstream Strategies, will also attend the meeting.

He said the firm has been working on a community greenhouse gas inventory for Morgantown over the past 18 months. They have been figuring the number of metric tons of CO2 the city emits per year per sector. The group is carrying out three phases of study with funding from Appalachian Stewardship.

"We have identified significant opportunities in small commercial and residential sectors in Morgantown to save on energy, reduce consumption and ultimately reduce greenhouse gas emissions," James said. "We want to promote the solar cooperative and have it be adopted widely among citizens so we can calculate greenhouse gas emissions reductions."

All parties think solar cooperatives could work in Morgantown.

"Many Morgantown residences have the right roof lines, area, angle, and direction appropriate for solar panels," Cubberly said.

For more information, WV SUN has posted information on formation of a local solar coop on its website at www.wvsun.org/solar-coops/morgantown-solar-co-op.

The Team plans to host more Green Nights. They will hold a lesson in composting from 6-7:30 p.m. March 26 in the library's Meeting Room A. The Second Green Households Fair will be from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. April 18 during the last Winter Farmer's Market at Wesley United Methodist Church (side door at 503 N. High St.) Experts will talk about energy audits, recycling, organic gardening, composting, beekeeping and more.

