



Written by [James Murphy](#) on May 10, 2018

California Bureaucrats Will Soon Require Solar Panels on New Homes: But Is It Safe?

The California Energy Commission, a group of unelected bureaucrats, is poised to approve new changes to the state building code. Among these changes is a requirement that all new housing be equipped with rooftop solar panels in an attempt to cut down on fossil-fuel usage and greenhouse gases, which many scientists believe contribute to climate change.



Expected to be approved today, the change to the building code would take effect in 2020. Current estimates are that the required solar panels will add an additional cost of \$8,000-\$12,000 per house. California would be the first state to make such a requirement, although it is also being discussed in New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Washington, D.C.

Supporters of the change believe that the additional upfront costs to homeowners will be offset in coming years by lower energy costs. "Any additional amount in the mortgage is more than offset," said Energy Commission member Andrew McAllister. "It's good for the customer; it's good for the homeowner."

"The best way to see this code update is as a step, an important step that we defined over a decade ago, part of an overall suite of reforms to reduce greenhouse gases," said McAllister. The panel is tasked with reviewing the building code every three years.

California law requires that half of the state's energy come from non-carbon producing sources by 2030. The new requirements require that builders either build each home with individual solar panels or build a shared solar power center for a group of homes, with the costs being shared among the homes' occupants. The new solar mandate also applies to newly built healthcare organizations. Also included in the new building code are updated insulation mandates.

The announcement is good news for the solar panel industry. "This is going to be a significant increase in the solar market in California," said industry spokesman Kelly Knutsen. "We're also sending a national message that ... we are a leader in the clean energy economy."

In a state where real estate prices are already through the roof, the new mandate adds another layer of costs. Some estimates say that the average mortgage will go up \$40 per month because of the new mandate. Proponents of the solar-panel requirement counter that the monthly energy bills will fall by twice that amount per month, thus recouping the initial investment over time.

"For housing to be affordable, it's not just upfront costs, but it's ongoing operating costs," said Rachel



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Golden of the environmental group The Sierra Club.

Government intrusion of this type is rarely a good answer for anything. And in this case, these non-elected bureaucrats may just be moving to meet an arbitrary goal for the reduction of greenhouse gases at the expense of something else the California state government is responsible for — the safety of its citizens.

Last year, wildfires in California destroyed more than 1.3 million acres of land in the state. Governor Jerry Brown famously blamed the destructive fire season on climate change, although it can be shown that much of the blame lies with the state and federal governments and their mismanagement of wild forests and chaparral areas. But regardless of who or what is to blame, will future fire seasons in the Golden State be made better by the addition of thousands of new ignition sources?

The link between solar panels and fires is a contentious one, but it is there. [The Society of Fire Prevention Engineers \(SFPE\)](#) notes the dangers. From SFPE's website: "One of the many dangers to solar panels is how the panel and its mounting system impact the combustibility of the overall roof system. Some solar panels, for example, include a backing of highly combustible plastic."

[Many home insurers require special riders](#) for homes with solar panels owing to the additional risks associated with them. It's ironic that in a state that is extremely vulnerable to wildfires, unelected bureaucrats have decided to add more possible ignition sources to each new home built.

Of course, none of this is to say that solar panels aren't useful and that they should never be used. But simply due to the risk involved in putting them on a home, especially in fire-prone areas, the decision on whether to use them or not should lie exclusively with the homeowner. It certainly shouldn't be the decision of unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats.

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