

# Choosing the **RIGHT** Solar Water Heating Contractor

California Solar Initiative (CSI) - Thermal Program



Contractors are your key to getting the best information about solar water heating systems and the one that is right for your business or multifamily property. Getting started is as easy as 1-2-3.

- 1 **Print this form**
- 2 **Visit [energycenter.org/swh/eligible\\_contractors](http://energycenter.org/swh/eligible_contractors) to locate qualified contractors in your area**
- 3 **Contact at least three contractors and use the attached form to compare your options**

## Tips and best practices for choosing a contractor

- ▶ **Hire only a licensed contractor:** Verify that the contractor's license is current and active by visiting the Contractor State License Board (CSLB) website at [www.cslb.ca.gov](http://www.cslb.ca.gov). The contractor must hold an A, B, C-4, C-36 or C-46 license. For solar pool installations, a contractor may hold a C-53 license.
- ▶ **Get references:** It's a good idea to obtain references from previous customers to ensure the costs were reasonable, the customers were satisfied and the systems are performing properly. You may also want to consult third-party review resources such as the Better Business Bureau or Yelp before making a final selection.
- ▶ **Keep a job file:** Place all receipts, permits, plans and anything else pertaining to your job in a file. You can start with this document!
- ▶ **Ask for identification:** During the contractor's initial visit, ask to see photo identification to verify their identity. You can also ask to see a copy of their CSLB pocket license. Sales representatives should carry their Home Improvement Salesperson registration card for you to verify their company affiliation.

## Signing a contract

A few key items to remember as you enter into an agreement.

- ▶ **Read the entire document carefully:** Make sure you understand everything (costs, warranties, maintenance agreements, rebate structure).
- ▶ **Ensure all quotes for the project are in writing:** Do not accept any verbal promises.
- ▶ **Pay as you go:** To start a job, never pay more than \$1,000 or 10% of the contract price (whichever is less) for a down payment under California state law.
- ▶ **Never pay cash:** Pay by check or credit card.
- ▶ **Hire insured contractors:** Always insist upon a certificate of insurance for general liability. Uninsured workers who are injured on the job may be able to file damage claims against the homeowner.
- ▶ **Verify workers' compensation insurance:** California requires this form of insurance for employers. If your contractor is exempt from the workers' compensation requirement, it means any workers on the job must belong to another subcontractor who is insured.

## For More Information

To learn more about solar water heating and available rebates, go to [energycenter.org/swh/business](http://energycenter.org/swh/business).

# Comparing Contractor Proposals

Use this bid comparison sheet to evaluate costs for each bid and the total projected energy savings of your new solar water heating system. Take caution against automatically selecting the lowest bid, and make sure to review the tips and best practices in this document before making your final decision.

Contractor Information		Bid #1	Bid #2	Bid #3
1	Company Name			
2	License Number			
3	System Description			
4	Solar Availability			
5	System Size (collector area square feet)			
6	Storage Volume (storage requirement)			
System Cost				
7	Base System Cost			
8	Additional Items			
9	Monitoring Cost (if applicable)			
10	Maintenance & Operations Costs (if applicable)			
11	Estimated Permit Fees			
12	Total Cost			
13	Financial Rebates, Incentives & Tax Credits			
14	Final Cost			
Other Factors				
15	Expected Annual Energy Savings			
16	Contractor Financing Options (if applicable)			
17	Warranty Timeframe			

This form is intended for informational use only. CCSE does not guarantee the quality or performance of any contractor and is not responsible for any goods or services selected.

## Description:

- Company Name:** Name of the solar contractor who provides the bid for the purchase and installation of the solar system.
- License Number:** Issued by the Contractor State License Board (CSLB). Confirm information about the contractor or sales representative at [www.cslb.ca.gov](http://www.cslb.ca.gov) or **800-321-2752**.
- System Description:** Is the contractor proposing an active or passive system? Are they proposing a system with a glycol heat transfer fluid? These choices have an impact on maintenance and cost.
- Solar Availability:** The amount of sunlight available on the collectors.
- System Size in Collector Area Square Feet:** Solar water heating systems come in different sizes. Contractors should determine the appropriate collector area and storage to meet 90-100% of your summer domestic hot water usage. The collector area is the panel area of the solar water heating system that is exposed to the sun.
- Storage Volume (storage requirement):** The storage volume is the amount of gallons the solar storage tank can hold.
- Base System Cost:** Some companies have a base system cost and then will add charges. Others will simply list total cost. Make sure you are clear on how the costs are listed and what those costs include.
- Additional Items:** Additional items are extra charges for items such as roof costs and piping. Be clear on whether these have already been included in your bid, if applicable.
- Monitoring Cost (if applicable):** Monitoring provides the ability to view the system's production online (at an extra cost). This may or may not be included in your bid.
- Maintenance & Operations Costs (if applicable):** Additional M&O costs due to system maintenance (i.e. replacing glycol, etc.)
- Estimated Permit Fees:** Permit fees should not vary between contractors. Each city or county jurisdiction sets its own permit charges.
- Total Cost:** Total price of the project, including materials, labor, taxes and any additional charges you have agreed to in the contract.
- Financial Rebates, Incentives or Tax Credits:** This should reflect deduction of any relevant financial rebates or incentives (local or state) and tax credits (state or federal), if applicable.
- Final Cost (after rebates, tax credits):** Refers to your out-of-pocket costs, after all applicable rebates and credits have been deducted.
- Expected Annual Energy Savings:** The system will displace a certain amount of annual therms or kilowatt-hours. Contractors should provide residential customers the energy savings from a system certified by the Solar Rating and Certification Corporation or the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials.
- Contractor Financing Options (if applicable):** Some contractors may offer financing methods, such as system leasing. If this is of interest to you, inquire with the contractor before soliciting a bid.
- Warranty Timeframe:** In order to qualify for the California Solar Initiative (CSI)-Thermal Program rebate, the system must come with
  - A minimum 10-year warranty on the solar collectors.
  - One-year warranty on installation labor and workmanship not otherwise covered by the manufacturer's performance warranty.
  - 10-year performance warranty to protect the purchaser against more than a 15 percent degradation of system performance over the 10-year period that may occur as a result of faulty installation.