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New wave of rooftop solar energy systems offer options for Hawaiian Electric customers

HONOLULU, Sept. 8, 2016 – The Public Utilities Commission’s capacity limit on rooftop solar systems that export energy to the power grid has nearly been reached on O'ahu.

But solar remains a viable choice for Hawaiian Electric customers who want it. A new kind of non-export system developed exclusively for the Hawai'i market is now available.

These systems enable households to generate their own electricity and to potentially store energy for use after the sun goes down. They are being installed under the Hawaiian Electric Companies' Customer Self-Supply Program. Two systems on O'ahu have been installed and turned on, with 20 more approved for installation.

Customer Self-Supply offers an alternative to the popular Customer Grid-Supply Program, which covers systems that send excess power to the electric grid and has nearly reached the 25-megawatt capacity limit set by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC). As of Sept. 2, the capacity of approved systems under the grid-supply program totals nearly 23 megawatts.

“This is the next evolution in solar energy systems. Solar power is a significant part of our plans to reach 100 percent renewable energy and an important option for our customers and we expect more customers will install self-supply systems,” said Jim Alberts, Hawaiian Electric senior vice president for customer service.

Hawaiian Electric, Maui Electric, and Hawai'i Electric Light Company are national leaders in the adoption of rooftop solar energy, with more than 78,000 systems already approved for installation. Approximately one-third of all single family homes on O'ahu have been approved to install a rooftop solar energy system.

Customers of Maui Electric and Hawai'i Electric Light may also consider the self-supply program, as they have recently reached the grid-supply capacity limits set by the PUC.

The self-supply systems are being developed specifically for the Hawai'i market and use new inverter technology to provide power to the home but prevent any excess electricity from being exported to the grid. That's important because, unlike the interconnected power grids on the mainland, there's a physical limit to the amount of electricity that can be put on island grids at any given moment.

More…
A growing number of these self-supply systems now meet the specifications set by the PUC. Hawaiian Electric has been working with these companies to develop standard technical specifications that will qualify systems for an expedited approval and potentially faster installation. This will ensure continued safe, reliable service for all customers and provide opportunities for more customers to enjoy the benefits of solar energy.

For more information, go to www.hawaiianelectric.com/distributedenergyresources.

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