



# Information Item

Date: July 28, 2009

To: Mayor and City Council  
From: Jim Hone, Fire Chief  
Subject: Implementation Impacts of Solar Photovoltaic Installation Standards

## **Introduction**

This report details the implementation impacts that the ordinance establishing solar photovoltaic installation standards has had on the business community and residents of Santa Monica.

## **Background**

On September 9, 2008 the City Council approved an ordinance adding Section 8.40.030 to the Santa Monica municipal code to establish solar photovoltaic installation standards to ensure public safety. The City Council requested periodic updates on the implementation impacts of the ordinance. This report will provide the City Council with the requested information.

## **Discussion**

In July 2007, the CAL FIRE Office of the State Fire Marshall established a Task Force to develop guidelines for installing solar photovoltaic ("PV") systems. The Task Force included members of local fire service agencies and the solar PV industry who worked together to develop guidelines that would ensure fire service access to perform rescue and fire suppression operations on buildings with installed PV systems while maintaining a reasonable volume of PV system installations.

Santa Monica Fire Department staff participated in the Task Force meetings and was instrumental in developing guidelines that appropriately balances public safety and fire suppression concerns with opportunities for installation of clean, distributed renewable energy systems.

The State Fire Marshal has encouraged localities to implement these guidelines based on the California Health and Safety Code Section 18941.5 which provides that the City may establish more restrictive building standards if they are reasonably necessary due to local climatic, geological or topographical conditions.

Through information provided by the Solar Santa Monica program, Building and Safety and the Santa Monica Fire Department most of the major installers of solar PV systems in the city were contacted about the proposed ordinance prior to Council action.

While this ordinance applies to safety regulations, the City Council adopted a new solar ordinance on July 14<sup>th</sup> that modifies Zoning standards and creates a streamlined permitting process. Together, these ordinances eliminate technical obstacles that created unnecessary problems on for many building situations in the past.

## **Summary**

Since the adoption of the Solar Photovoltaic Installation Standards a comprehensive compliance guide has been developed and distributed to the solar industry and posted on the City's websites: [www.santamonicafire.org](http://www.santamonicafire.org) and [www.solarsantamonica.com](http://www.solarsantamonica.com) Staff has received very positive feedback from the solar industry and installation contractors with only a few alternate installation methods being proposed. Thirty four (34) PV systems have been installed or have been approved for installation since the ordinance was approved. Of those installations, only four (4) locations requested alternate installation methods. Staff will continue to monitor the technology and Solar Industry advancements to keep apprised of other emerging technologies related to the Solar Standards ordinance and make periodic adjustments as warranted.

**Prepared By:** Jim Glew, Fire Marshal