

Questions For Power Utility Company

What To Ask

“I’m planning to install a solar-plus-battery backup system at my home. I need to know what your policies are for connecting that kind of system — who would I talk to about that?”

Questions If You Want To Sell Back Power

1. **Do you allow customers to sell excess solar power back to the grid?**
(If yes, ask what your “buy-back” rate is — retail, avoided cost, or time-of-use.)
2. **What type of inverters and systems are approved for interconnection?**
(Some utilities only allow UL-1741/IEEE-1547-listed “grid-interactive” models.)
3. **What is the approval process for interconnection? Fees & timeline for approval?**
(Ask about forms, engineering review time, and fees.)
4. **Do you require a visible, lockable disconnect or special bi-directional metering?**
(If yes, who pays for this? This affects cost, layout, and inspection.)
5. **What is your maximum system size (kW) or annual energy limit for residential members?**

Questions If You Want Backup Power Only (no selling back)

1. **If my system never exports power to the grid, do I still need an interconnection agreement?**
Some utilities still require approval even if your system can’t push power out.
2. **Do you recognize “backup-only” or “non-parallel” systems as separate from grid-tied systems?**
This clarifies whether your setup is treated like a generator or like solar.
3. **What proof or documentation do you need that my system can’t backfeed the grid?**
You may need to show wiring diagrams or inverter settings.
4. **Do you require any external disconnects or labeling for backup-only systems?**
A visible switch or signage might still be mandatory for lineman safety.
5. **Can I charge my batteries from the grid, or must charging come only from solar?**
Some utilities prohibit grid charging to avoid demand spikes.

General Questions For Either Type of System

1. **Who performs inspections — the AHJ, the utility, or both?**
This helps you plan the correct sequence of permits and sign-offs.
2. **Do you require insurance or liability for member-owned generation?**
Some utilities require proof of homeowner’s or liability coverage for grid-tied systems.
3. **Are there standby charges or additional monthly fees for customers with generation?**
These hidden charges can change the economics of your system.
4. **Do you offer any rebates or incentives for solar or battery storage?**
Incentives or rebates can offset system costs — but often require pre-approval.
5. **Who should I contact in your engineering department for technical approval questions?**
Having a direct contact helps you avoid long delays later in the process.

Questions For Electrical Authorities

(Authority Having Jurisdiction - AHJ)

What To Ask

“Hi, I’m planning to install a solar-plus-battery backup system at my home and want to make sure I understand your permitting and inspection requirements. Who would I talk to about that?”

Questions

- 1. Are there any limits on battery size or placement inside garages or utility rooms?**
Any preferred locations? If larger than a certain size, they may require batteries to be in a detached building
- 2. Do you require any drawings or schematics of the system? Do they need to be engineer-stamped or will manufacturer schematics and manuals suffice?**
Some AHJs only need spec sheets and a simple one-line; others want PE-stamped plans.
- 3. If the system is backup-only and doesn’t sell to the grid, is utility approval still required before you issue the permit?**
Confirms whether the AHJ expects a utility sign-off (some don’t care if it’s non-parallel).
- 4. What version of the electrical code do you use right now?**
This helps you (or your installer) know which safety rules to follow.
- 5. Who comes out for the inspection — just the electrical inspector, or also the fire department?**
This helps you plan ahead and know who will look at your system.
- 6. Do I need to get my utility’s approval before you’ll issue the permit?**
This is important if you’re not planning to sell power back and just want backup power.
- 7. Are there any special labels or signs I need to put on the panels or disconnect switches?**
That way, you can order the right labels before inspection day.
- 8. Do disconnects or subpanels need to be visible from the outside or grouped together?**