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Best conditions for solar still ahead? For many projects, the answer is yes

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Regulatory: While the Mass. Department of Energy Resources (DOER) works out the legalese for its next solar incentive program, some good news has emerged for businesses that are considering solar renewable energy systems: There's STILL an opportunity to participate in the initial Solar Carve Out Program and take advantage of state and federal incentives while saving on electrical costs and helping out the environment.

As we discussed in last month's column, governor Deval Patrick announced in May that the state had surpassed its goal of 400 MW (megawatts) of installed solar capacity four years sooner than was expected. He set a new target four times larger - 1,600 MW of deployed solar installations in the state by 2020 - and the state is working on the guidelines for this new program, called SREC II (Solar Renewable Energy Certificates). However, projects are still able to participate in the existing Solar Carve-Out Program provided they meet size, contract and construction deadlines.

You may have heard this interim policy only applies to solar projects less than 100 kW in size - i.e., roof sizes less than 10,000 s/f of usable space; but let me explain how this works for larger projects, with roof sizes greater than 10,000 s/f. Businesses considering a larger system can take a phased approach: complete the first 100 kW portion of the project under the existing Solar Carve Out Program and complete the remainder of the project under the SREC II program. This approach ensures the best possible incentives and energy savings are gained for the project as the new terms are worked out for SREC II.

Production: The recent heat wave probably had many business owners looking at how their air conditioning consumption impacted their electricity bills and lamenting the fact that they probably missed the "best days for solar" this year. However, high heat days are generally not the best solar-producing days. In fact, it's those cool, sunny days of fall and spring that we experience in New England that are the peak conditions for solar generation, meaning the best days of the year are still ahead.

There are several conditions that impact how much electricity your solar PV (photovoltaic) system will produce. If your roof has southern exposure and is free of shade most of the day, it may be a good candidate for maximum solar generation, even in the winter months.

A professional solar project developer can best evaluate your roof and help you understand all the benefits of solar, including the solar incentive programs and design efficiencies described above.

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