



Program Challenges Southeastern MA Residents to Become Smarter Energy Consumers

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Partnership With Real Goods Solar Expected to Expand Solar Adoption in SouthCoast Region

Dartmouth, MA, July 31, 2012 – The SouthCoast Energy Challenge, an initiative of the Southeastern Environmental Education Alliance (SEEAL), launched in August 2011, has picked up momentum across Southeastern Massachusetts towns. The Challenge promotes energy efficiency and renewable energy adoption and has earned the attention of community leaders, town officials and private companies, while helping area residents save money. Real Goods Solar has partnered with SEEAL to offer special pricing to Challenge participants to help homeowners lower their energy costs with solar energy and several residents have already taken advantage of the opportunity.

As a result of the Challenge's Solar Initiative, Fall River resident Rick Schenck signed the program's first contract to install a solar electric system on his home. Real Goods Solar will install a 4.8 kW solar electric system which will cover 98% of Mr. Schenck's home's electric usage. Mr. Schenck said of the Challenge and Real Goods Solar, "Both are very knowledgeable and thorough which made for a very easy decision. Not only am I recouping my investment in five years and saving on energy for the next 20-30 years but I can also feel good about helping the environment. I haven't been this excited about anything in years!"

To date, 182 homeowners have had their homes assessed for solar and 4 have purchased PV systems through the SouthCoast Energy Challenge's partnership with Real Goods Solar. "We see a future where SouthCoast families are healthier, our air and water cleaner, and we are each benefitting economically by being more thoughtful energy consumers," said SEEAL Director Jennifer Marshall.

According to Jim Oliva, the Regional Sales Manager from Real Goods Solar, community energy saving initiatives empower residents to take their energy costs into their own hands. "When you can spend less on solar electricity every month than you would spend with your current utility, that's a no-brainer," Oliva said. In fact, the "no-brainer" is one of the solar options available through the Challenge. It consists of a power purchase agreement, requiring no upfront payments, and electric bill savings every month.

In the promotion of energy efficiency, the Challenge suggests residents sign up for a no-cost home energy assessment. Residents already pay for this via an energy conservation fee on their utility bill, it is a value of \$300-500, and it typically saves 3-5% on energy bills after it is completed. Home energy assessments take about an hour; an expert comes into your home to make simple improvements and suggests ways for deeper efficiency. The Challenge has forwarded almost 1000 leads for residents to get home energy assessments, of which almost 300 have been completed and 95 deeper weatherization contracts have been signed. The Challenge itself has over 1,400 participants with \$57,688 worth of completed energy savings!

"Our region and its residents are leaders in living a clean energy lifestyle and in taking action together to affect local, state, and national policy," said Community Organizer Andy Erickson. "This is the vision that guides the Energy Challenge. We challenge SouthCoast residents to join us to meet our goal of signing up 10,000 homes and reducing our energy use by 15% this year!"

The network of SEEAL Energy Challenge Lead Partners that has supported the program's formation will be the driving force of the Challenge Solar Initiative. They'll utilize their vast networks of contacts, memberships, outreach events and venues to spread the word about how the SouthCoast Energy Challenge positively affects individual residents and the community as a whole. For every home they successfully sign up for solar, the Energy Challenge will donate \$300 to their organization. Lead Partners include Marion Institute, UMass Dartmouth, Bristol Community College, SEMAP, and the Ocean Explorium.

Visit www.southcoastenergychallenge.org to sign up for a home solar assessment – and choose one of these organizations as your referral – to learn more about solar and to support them at the same time.

About SEEAL

The longest-running program fund of the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts, SEEAL is a non-profit network of over 40 partner organizations governed by a 21-member Board of Directors collaborating to mobilize community resources and increase capacity for environmental education programs and activities. For over a decade, SEEAL has acted as an umbrella organization, applying for and providing over \$1.5 million in grants to local non-profits and organizations that provide environmental education, outreach, and mitigation in Southeastern Massachusetts.

About Real Goods Solar

Real Goods Solar is a leading solar energy integrator, having installed over 13,000 solar electric systems for homes, schools and businesses. We offer turnkey solutions, and have 34 years of experience in solar energy, beginning with its sale of the first solar photovoltaic panels in the U.S. in 1978. With 15 offices in California, Colorado and the Northeast, Real Goods Solar is one of the largest residential solar installers in the country. For more information, visit RealGoodsSolar.com or call 1-888-56-SOLAR.