



# CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

Fighting for Illinois Consumers

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## **Grow Solar Chicagoland Group Buy Program Ends, 76 Properties Going Solar**

*Bulk Purchase Program Helps New Solar Buyers Learn and Save Together*

**Chicago, IL**—The [Grow Solar Chicagoland](#) group buy program has ended for the year, with 76 properties contracted to install renewable energy in the coming months. In a year when global energy costs are elevated, Chicago-area residents are moving toward renewable energy, securing affordable electricity for years to come. And by choosing to go solar with a community-led bulk purchase program, participants reduced the effects of inflation and secured a lower price on their new solar arrays.

Grow Solar Chicagoland, an initiative between the [Midwest Renewable Energy Association](#) (MREA) and Citizens Utility Board, helps make navigating the solar market easier and more affordable with its limited-time group buy. The program uses the power of bulk purchasing to secure a lower base price for solar panels, and includes a rebate that gets larger as more participants are added. This means that by sharing the program with family and friends, participants can turn grassroots interest into real savings on their new solar arrays.

This year the program surpassed two benchmarks, providing a discount of over \$600 in addition to federal and state rebates. In the first year alone, the program is expected to save all participants \$71,297, or an average of \$950 in energy savings per household (actual savings depend on usage and system size).

Returning to Chicagoland after a hiatus in 2021, this year's program kicked off in May and provided free, one-hour long educational sessions for members of the public. The program hosted 48 in-person and virtual presentations called "Solar Power Hours." Over 1,150 community members were able to attend and learn about solar energy.

"We're trying to simplify the process of going solar," said Marta Monti, MREA Solar Program Director. "It can seem complicated, so we present clear information and answer folks' questions at our Solar Power Hours, and then they can determine for themselves whether solar is right for them."

Program participant Abigail Austin and her husband began thinking about solar energy after an acquaintance installed panels. They decided to learn more at a Grow Solar Chicagoland informational presentation. "When we learned more about solar and about the incentives, including the solar group buy program, [we decided] adding solar panels to our home was affordable and money well spent," Austin said. "Sitting through the initial webinar with Grow Solar Chicagoland was great because it was a no-pressure, easy-to-understand look at adding solar panels to our home."

Rising energy prices and the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in August may have increased interest in solar energy and the group buy program. Among many renewable energy incentives, the IRA extended the existing solar federal tax credit for 10 more years (it was set to expire in 2023) and raised the credit amount to 30% of the array's cost.

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“In an uncertain world, solar power provides a level of stability, since you’re essentially buying decades of your energy up-front,” said Jeff Schneider, program coordinator for the Midwest Renewable Energy Association. “Unlike utilities, solar panels will never raise their rates. So by purchasing solar now, community members can protect themselves from future price hikes, which feels especially satisfying amid global inflation.”

Since 2019, Grow Solar Chicagoland has helped 282 properties go solar and has taught more than 2,000 Solar Power Hour attendees about the science and benefits of solar. In addition to the money saved on energy bills, the solar arrays installed through the program offset a significant amount of CO<sub>2</sub> pollution each year, equivalent to 193,887 gallons of gasoline, or nearly 2 million pounds of coal burned.\*

Grow Solar Chicagoland 2022 was supported by a competitively-selected solar installer, Chicago-based [Windfree Solar](#), as well as by a close partnership with the [Citizens Utility Board of Illinois \(CUB\)](#), a consumer advocate.

“As a consumer advocate that cares about lowering utility bills, CUB is glad to step up and provide folks in the community with unbiased information about the benefits of solar power,” said Marina Minic, solar programs administrator for CUB. “At a time of high utility bills, this group-buy program provides consumers with a money-saving option, and it makes solar power an even better deal than it already is.”

She added that the program also was bolstered by support from dozens of municipalities, community organizations, churches, conservation groups and county officials. These partners were instrumental in promoting the program and hosting presentations across the large program area.

While the program is closed for the year, stay tuned for a future group buy in the Chicago area. To learn more about Grow Solar Chicagoland, please visit: [chicagoland.growsolar.org](http://chicagoland.growsolar.org)

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*The MREA was incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit shortly after the first [Energy Fair](#) in 1990. MREA’s mission is to promote renewable energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable living through education and demonstration. To learn more, call 715-592-6595 or visit [www.midwestrenew.org](http://www.midwestrenew.org).*

*CUB is Illinois’ leading nonprofit utility watchdog. Created by the Illinois Legislature, CUB opened its doors in 1984 to represent the interests of residential and small-business utility customers. Since then, it has saved consumers more than \$20 billion by helping block rate hikes, secure refunds and fight for clean, low-cost energy. For more information, call CUB’s Consumer Hotline, 1-800-669-5556, or visit its website, [www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org](http://www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org).*

*\*Carbon dioxide equivalents are calculated with the EPA Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator, [www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator](http://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator). Values calculated using a conservative estimate of yearly energy output.*

**Additional resources including photos and program logos available for download at: [Grow Solar Chicagoland Media](#)**