

# Solar Overview

## Energy Efficiency – First Step in Alternative Energy

---

Energy Efficiency is the first step in any viable plan designed to develop an energy resource such as wind, solar and biomass energy. Energy efficiency is the way to ensure that energy created from both traditional and alternative energy sources is not wasted. The Michigan Energy Office has a number of programs that can assist local communities enhance their energy efficiency as a first step in their energy resources development plans.

[ENERGY STAR Program](#) - ENERGY STAR is a national program that provides objective third-party verification that a product has high energy performance. ENERGY STAR rated buildings, for example, perform in the top 25% of buildings in the U.S. with regard to energy usage.

[Businesses & Non Profits](#) - Energy efficiency is a great opportunity for businesses and non-profit organizations to reduce their energy costs. For example, the Green Lodging Michigan program assists hotels, motels, resorts, and bed and breakfasts to implement energy efficient and "green" cost saving practices and certifies facilities that have adopted "green" practices. The Green Venues Michigan is designed to encourage (and assist) facilities to adopt cost saving, green practices which conserve natural resources and prevent pollution. The Green Venues Michigan program was modeled after the Green Lodging Michigan program.

[Residential Energy Efficiency](#) - the Michigan Energy Office currently supports eight "Michigan Energy Demonstration Centers" located throughout the State. The Michigan Energy Demonstration Centers promote energy efficiency, renewable energy, green building and sustainable living solutions for Michigan residents and businesses.

[Public Buildings](#) - MEO has a number of program that support public buildings. For example, the Rebuild Michigan Program fosters partnerships that promote increased energy efficiency within a community. Partners may include local governments, schools, universities, businesses, non-profit organizations and public housing authorities. With assistance from state government and other partners each community can determine energy saving opportunities and goals and work to implement an energy action plan.

[Michigan Clean Cities Program](#) - Clean Cities is a locally-based government and industry partnership, coordinated by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to expand the use of alternatives to gasoline and diesel fuel.

Green Communities Program - All Michigan communities are eligible to participate in the Michigan Municipal League's Green Communities Challenge, a program designed to reflect the governing body's commitment to adopt policies and programs of energy efficiency and conservation. Participating communities are promoted as a part of a nationally recognized program.

[Michigan Public Service Commission, Energy Efficiency](#) - Since PA 295 was signed into law in October of 2008, Energy Efficiency has become a top priority in Michigan! MPSC operates a number of programs to encourage energy efficiency among rate payers.

## Solar Energy Overview

---

Solar technologies directly harness energy from the sun. Solar technologies include photovoltaic systems that convert sunlight to electricity, solar hot water systems that heat water for swimming pools and buildings, and solar space heating systems that provide heat for buildings. [Solar Power Installed in Michigan](#)

The Michigan Energy Office has compiled a variety of resources to assist communities and businesses in pursuing solar energy-related projects, including sample zoning guidelines, studies, incentive programs, and other guidance documents, below.

### History of Solar Energy

While solar energy entered the modern thought stream in the early 1980's, many Michigan communities are only now addressing zoning issues associated with the widespread application of solar. Of important note for local governments in Michigan is the fact that solar-related laws, ordinances and zoning has been practiced, in varying forms, for centuries by governments (See: Ken Butti and John Perlin, *A Golden Thread: 2500 Years of Solar Architecture and Technology*). Moreover, "solar access" (i.e., one's rights to solar light) is well documented in law and legal precedence (See: Solar Energy Research Institute (SERI), *Solar Law Reporter*).