

Arizona Business & Money

Surprisingly little damage to rooftop solar panels

by **Ryan Randazzo** - Sept. 30, 2011 04:15 PM
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The epic hailstorm did surprisingly little damage to the tens of thousands of pricey solar-power arrays built on metro Phoenix rooftops in recent years.

Entire solar arrays can cost \$30,000 or more depending on their size, but damage from the storm was limited.

Warranties on [solar panels](#) don't usually cover hail damage, and the bill for a broken panel or two can cost several hundred dollars.

American Solar Electric Inc. of Scottsdale, one of the largest installation companies in the area, reported that it had about 2,800 rooftop arrays installed at the time of the storm, and those arrays had about 100,000 individual glass solar panels among them that were likely exposed to hail as the storm moved across the metro area.

Two panels on two separate homes were broken by hail that day, spokeswoman Joy Seitz said. In both cases, the homeowner had to pay about \$500 for a new panel to be installed, she said.

Solar-panel maker SunPower reported that a 6.5-acre solar array on the roof of a Phoenix industrial building saw hail damage to three of the 8,000 panels on the roof, while the rest of the building looked like it had been "machine gunned."

"Facing the most severe weather conditions, (the company) was able to maintain business as usual," SunPower said.

American Solar sent an e-mail after the storm to its customers asking them to call if they had concerns that the hail damaged their panels, but few noticed any change.

If one [solar panel](#) on a roof is damaged, it will reduce the output of the entire system because strings of solar panels only produce as much electricity as the weakest panel in the system, which is why shade is so detrimental to solar performance. Even if one solar panel on an array is shaded, the entire array's output is affected.

"People would notice pretty fast if there was a problem," said Seitz, adding that her company did many roofing repairs for customers whose solar arrays survived the storm but whose shingles did not.

Experts recommend that people with solar arrays installed contact their [insurance company](#) to get the proper level of protection, said Stephen Clarke, an assistant vice president for the Insurance Services Office in New Jersey, an information company.

The ISO is studying a variety of alternative energy technologies to properly estimate their liability, he said.

"We are looking at whether there is any additional risk because you have these installations on your property," he said. "I think a lot of people don't recognize that once you've installed one of these on your building, you've increased the value of your structure. If you don't evaluate your level of insurance or report it to your insurance company, you run the risk of being underinsured."

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