

Business

California passes solar mandate

Ivan Penn

LONG a leader and trendsetter in its clean-energy goals, California took a giant step on Wednesday, becoming the first state to require all new homes to have solar power.

The requirement, to take effect in two years, brings solar power into the mainstream in a way it has never been until now. It will add thousands of dollars to the cost of a home when a shortage of affordable housing is one of California's most pressing issues.

That made the relative ease of its approval – in a unanimous vote by the five-member California Energy Commission before a standing-room crowd, with little debate – all the more remarkable.

State officials and clean-energy advocates say the extra cost to homebuyers will be more than made up for in lower energy bills. That prospect has won over even the construction industry, which has embraced solar capability as a selling point.

"This adoption of these standards represents a quantum leap," Bob Raymer, senior engineer for the California Building Industry Association, said during the public comments before the vote. "You can bet every state will be watching to see what happens."

Several California cities have required that some new buildings include solar power or have made commitments to 100 percent clean energy through various sources. New Jersey, Massachusetts and Washington, DC, have also considered legislation to require that new buildings be solar-ready, according to the National



A solar farm near Cholame, California, August 18, 2016. ANDREW BURTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

The requirement is expected to add \$8,000 to \$12,000 to the cost of a home. "Our druthers would have been to have this delayed another two or three years," said Raymer of the building-industry group. But he was not surprised. "We've known this was coming," he said. "The writing was on the wall."

For residential homeowners, based on a 30-year mortgage, the Energy Commission estimates that the standards will add about \$40 to an average monthly payment but save consumers \$80 on monthly heating, cooling and lighting bills.

Separately, the revised code counts the installation of electricity-storage systems toward the overall energy-efficiency requirements for new homes, as it already does for solar hot-water heaters.

The solar mandate will also apply to new health care facilities. But the biggest growth area is residential construction.

California averages about 80,000 new homes a year, with about 15,000 currently including solar installations. Overall, at the current rate of home building, the new requirement will increase the annual number of rooftop solar installations by 44 percent.

The utility industry has been preparing for the proliferation of energy-producing homes by studying its impact on the electric grid with tests like a net-zero community developed in Fontana, east of Los Angeles. The utilities are trying to determine how to manage a system where homes are putting electricity onto the grid during the day and consuming it at night.

"We've been working towards it," said Ram Narayananamurthy, technical executive at the Electric Power Research

Winners announced for capital electric project
THE Kingdom's electricity authority announced the winning bidders on Thursday for an expansion and distribution project in the capital funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The endeavour, which will be undertaken by Toenec Corporation and Sumitomo Electric Industries Ltd as well as Siemens Limited, was clinched with a bid of \$50.76 million. Electricite Du Cambodge (EdC) Director-General Keo Rattanak said the loan from JICA will help to expand the transmission and electricity distribution in Phnom Penh, which would help to steady supply levels, reduce the cost of electricity as well as strengthen local commerce and industry. He didn't reveal when the project was expected to end. **POST STAFF**

NBC clears managers in handling of Lauer
AN INVESTIGATION by NBCUniversal's legal team exonerated NBC News management of any wrongdoing regarding Matt Lauer's workplace conduct, the company said on Wednesday. The report came five months after NBC News fired Lauer, the former *Today* show star, following a complaint about inappropriate sexual behaviour with a subordinate. Although the inquiry absolved network leaders, NBC also faced concerns – including from