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## Deadline for solar discounts extended

*K Kaufmann  
The Desert Sun*

One Block Off the Grid, the San Francisco firm that offers discount pricing on solar installations, will extend its current campaign in the Coachella Valley an extra month, company officials said Wednesday.

Known as 1BOG, the company organizes buying blocks of 100 or more residents and hooks them up with a vetted solar installer who commits to providing low rates to all members.

"I thought their approach was a good approach," said Cecile Morgan of Rancho Mirage, who will be one of the first 1BOG members in the valley to have a system installed.

"We've been looking at this for a long time, waiting for everything to get affordable and doable."

The campaign, originally scheduled to end Dec. 12, will now run through Jan. 12 to allow more outreach to the valley's snowbirds, said Dave Llorens, 1BOG general manager.

"You're seeing a delayed buying cycle," Llorens said. "We think we're going to get a bunch of people to (sign up) in the winter."

Since the company kicked off its local campaign in October, about 190 residents have registered on the group's Web site, with about 90 asking for estimates, Llorens said.

A dozen have signed contracts with HelioPower, the Murrieta installer chosen for the campaign, said Scott Gordon, vice president of residential sales for the company.

The firm is providing discount packages for 1BOG members in the valley, with prices ranging from \$5.49 to \$6.99 per watt, depending on the type of panel. Prices at other solar installers in the area are \$7 to \$8 per watt.

Gordon said the valley's slightly older demographics also have pushed a shift in 1BOG's typical online marketing efforts.

"The general population of the Coachella Valley is not as Internet-based as (1BOG) is used to," he said. "We need to go through more traditional media."

The company is planning a kick-off event for the extended campaign at 6:30 p.m. Dec. 9 at the Henderson Community Building in Palm Desert.

But Llorens said campaign results in the valley so far are proportionately better than in larger urban areas, such as San Diego.

And, because of the valley's large homes and high electric bills, the systems that residents are buying are bigger, including one 17-kilowatt system that is the largest ever bought in a 1BOG campaign, he

said.

A for-profit company, 1BOG makes its money by charging the installer a marketing fee.

Since its founding in June 2008, the company has mounted campaigns in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, San Diego, New Orleans, Phoenix and Denver.

After signing up with 1BOG, Morgan convinced her sister Heather McGuigan, also of Rancho Mirage, to join the group. McGuigan said her system could be installed in January.

The new systems on the sisters' homes both will cost about \$22,000, including state rebates and the federal income tax credit, they said.

Morgan and her husband, Jeff, expect to save 75 to 80 percent on their monthly electric bills, while McGuigan said she and her husband, Ed, could completely zero out yearly bills totaling about \$3,400.

"We liked the whole concept of it, trying to get enough people signed on to generate enough power to be noticeable," Heather McGuigan said.

"It's doing the right thing. (Even) if you're just one small part, you know you're doing something."

## Additional Facts

If you go

What: One Block Off the Grid campaign event

When: 6:30 p.m. Dec. 9

Where: Henderson Community Building, 72-559 Highway 111, Palm Desert

Information: (951) 677-7755

How it works

Coachella Valley residents can join One Block Off the Grid by signing up on the company's Web site, [www.1bog.org](http://www.1bog.org). The campaign covers all valley cities and some nearby communities, including Thousand Palms and Sky Valley. You must own your own home to qualify.

HelioPower, the company's designated installer in the valley, will then contact 1BOG members, ensure their homes are appropriate for solar and provide bids for systems.

HelioPower's pricing range will from \$5.49 to \$6.99 per watt, depending on the type of panel a person chooses.

Using the lowest rate, \$5.49 per watt, a 4-kilowatt system, about 20 panels, will have a net cost of about \$10,857, after state rebates and the federal tax credit for solar energy, according to Scott Gordon, HelioPower's vice president for residential sales.

For valley residents, the break-even point for such a system could range from five years to 12 years, Gordon said. Southern California Edison customers, who pay tiered rates, would get a quicker return on their investment than east valley residents in the Imperial Irrigation District service area, who pay lower rates, he said.

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