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Energy, the Environment and the Bottom Line

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Homeowners Associations: The Enemy of Solar?

By [Kate Galbraith](#)

Kirk J. Condyles for The New York Times Not all homeowners associations approve of this sort of thing.

John Wood, a homeowner in Woodbury, Minn., wanted to put solar panels on his roof. Last month, his homeowners association rejected his application.

“I felt extremely disappointed,” Mr. Wood said by telephone.

He added: “It made me think that homeowners associations are in place to do only one thing, and that is to maintain the status quo, and they have no interest in any sort of change whatsoever.”

Al Rudnickas, the president of the board of the Wedgewood Association, the homeowners’ group, said that the board was open to less obtrusive technologies like solar shingles. But in this case, “The feeling of the board was that what was proposed wasn’t aesthetically pleasing in keeping with the standards of the community,” he said.

Mr. Rudnickas said that the association invited Mr. Wood to submit a modified application, but Mr. Wood — who is the first homeowner in the association to apply for solar panels — said he was not sure whether he will do so.

Mr. Wood’s case, [first reported in the Woodbury Bulletin](#), has echoes around the nation.

In Somerset County in New Jersey, a homeowner was [ordered to take down 28 panels](#).

In California, another homeowner, Marc Weinberger, [sued his homeowners association](#) last year after his efforts to put solar panels on his roof were rejected.

Mr. Weinberger and his lawyer, Michael McQueen, have since told Green Inc. that their motion for summary judgment was granted, and Mr. Weinberger installed a system early this year.

In another California case, Marty Griffin, a homeowner in Santa Clarita, applied to put solar panels on a hillside on his property. The association said no, but he went ahead anyway and got sued.

The litigation has been under way for more than a year. Mr. Griffin says the association did not respond in a timely way to his application; a lawyer for the association, Ricardo Cestero, told Green Inc. that Mr. Griffin “did not follow correct procedures.”

Mr. Griffin details his saga, including [legal documents](#), on his [Web site](#).

For solar installers, the roadblocks can be frustrating. John Berger, the chief executive of [Standard Renewable Energy](#), a Houston-based firm that designs and installs solar systems for homes, said that the homeowner associations’ prohibitions had already cost him more than \$1 million in business.

“It is a big problem,” he said.

Lawmakers in Texas are [considering a bill](#) that would prevent homeowner associations from banning solar panels, and [similar laws](#) are already in place in a dozen or more states, according to the [Database of State Initiatives for Renewable Energy](#) — including [Arizona](#), [Colorado](#), [Florida](#) and [California](#), among others.

Mr. Wood said he planned to contact his state legislators in the hopes of enacting this type of law in Minnesota.

The laws, however, are rarely comprehensive, as some of the California cases suggest.

Rusty Haynes, a project manager at the [North Carolina Solar Center](#), which manages the D.S.I.R.E. database, said that some applied only to new construction, and others might be vague or limited in scope.

In Arizona a few years ago, a homeowner was [challenged over the color of her panels](#) (they were apparently too dark), despite a state law intended to smooth the process.

Readers, we would love to hear from you as we potentially develop this story for the paper. Has this happened in your community? Is this an issue for you? Feel free to comment below, or e-mail us at greeninc@nytimes.com.