



PRESS RELEASE

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## **Center for a Sustainable Coast Hosts Forum on the Future of Solar Power in Georgia**

On December 1, about fifty people came to the Coastal Georgia Center in Savannah to learn about the impressive opportunities for using solar energy in Georgia. This forum was the latest in a series of public policy discussions hosted by the Center to advocate a sustainable future.

The solar power issue is especially timely after a recent decision by Georgia's Public Service Commission urged a solar business, Georgia Solar Utilities (GSU), to seek legislative changes that would allow it to proceed with its plan to sell electricity generated by solar energy in the state. The chief executive officer of GSU, Robert Green, was one of the featured speakers at the event.

He made several very illuminating points.

- At current prices, generating electricity with solar technology is already competitive, although this is often misunderstood.
- Under current law, a solar energy provider cannot distribute their power to customers because of monopoly controls given to existing energy producers, such as Georgia Power. To allow solar power to be harnessed and distributed by new businesses, Georgia law must be amended.
- Rapid expansion in the use of clean, alternative energy is not only possible in Georgia, but has already been done in other places. For instance, Germany now produces as much as 50% of its total energy needs from solar power, most of which has been implemented in the last decade. This has been achieved despite Germany, due its location, having about half the annual amount of solar radiation available as Georgia.

Paul Wolff, a councilman from the City of Tybee Island, spoke about the benefits of rooftop solar power as a homeowner and self-taught expert. His presentation focused on the site-level use of solar equipment and related practical issues.

- To gain the greatest advantage and lowest cost of any source of electricity, reducing waste is essential. The energy efficiency of most homes can be greatly improved at relatively little cost – Paul spent less than \$50 to reduce power consumption at his home by some 30%.
- By installing solar panels at one's home, electric costs can be greatly reduced and, during some periods, excess electricity generated can produce income by selling it to the local power company. Paul said he expects savings from his investment to pay for all related costs within ten years.
- A troubling restriction under current Georgia law prevents businesses from leasing solar equipment to individuals who can then buy it back over time. Such lease-sales would enable many more people – including owners of both commercial property and private homes – to convert to using solar power. Here again, legislative amendments are needed in state law.

The Center's goal is to advise the public and engage them in an informed discussion about the best way to move forward. The Center will be working with other groups to explore, develop, and promote legislative options to enable the enormous benefits of solar power to be achieved in Georgia. Among these benefits are lower utility rates, competitive energy markets, and a cleaner environment.

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