Best residential solar panels review

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A recurring point we make on SolarReviewsis that solar panels last a long, long time;25-30 years to be exact. This makes it importantto buy solar panels with the following qualities:

While Bloombeg"s definition of Tier 1 is somewhat useful, in our view it"s insufficientas a guide for consumers. It only judges the solar panels based on past performance, anddoesn"t attempt to predict the future reliability of each manufacturer.

Given that solar panels last 25-30 years, we think much more weight should be givento the future prospects of the brand, as well as the manufacturer"s future economic viability.

They sign up a few dealers in America over the internet by offering cheap panels, but if there are any warrantyissues they pin the blame on an "installation error" or a "cosmetic defect" that isn"t covered by warranty.As these companies invest little to nothing in their brand in the US, they have nothing to lose. Often theywill simply start selling panels under a different brand.

Among these companies are also those that buy B-grade cells and wafers, and build panels out of them for cheap sale.Many of these smaller overseas companies also outsource large parts of their production to the cheapest contractor inChina, and so it is impossible to get a gauge on real manufacturing quality.

Leading US manufacturers SolarWorld, Suniva and Silicon Energy have all gone broke,while market leader SunPower has moved most of its panel manufacturing to Malaysia,the Philippines and Mexico. Tesla has also closed their planned solar panel manufacturingplant in Buffalo, New York.

We do know of two smaller brands that still make their panels in America: Mission Solar in Texas,and Washington-based Itek Energy (now owned by Canadian company Silfab). However, they are smallmanufacturers and we are unsure of their current production arrangements or volumes.

Although the Trump administration attempted to boost US manufacturing of solar panels by imposingtariffs on Chinese modules in 2018-2019, American-made panels have unfortunately been unable tocompete with the low cost and high quality of Chinese and other imports.

This group contains LG, Panasonic and SunPower. Their panels are the most expensive on the market.They are all good companies and offer very good products, but they are placed in the premium categoryfor different reasons.

LG and Panasonic make good panels. But they are considered premium because of the strength of theiroverall corporate brand -- and not because of the technical specifications of their panels. Their panelsare only

marginally, if at all, better than the other Tier 1 brands.

In our view, any technical benefit offered by LG and Panasonic panels is too small to justify the price premium.What justifies the price premium -- if it is justifiable -- is the overall reliability of these companies.

SunPower is different. They are in the premium category because their panels have long been market leadersin terms of panel efficiency, and they have grown a network of very high-quality installation partners. However,SunPower has recently sold off its panel manufacturing business into another listed entity called Maxeon,which is part-owned by a Chinese wafer manufacturer.

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Email: energystorage2000@gmail.com
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