

5. Conclusions

The market for solar PV is expanding rapidly in the U.S. Almost 100,000 PV systems have been installed in California alone, more than 90% of which are residential. Some of those “PV homes” have sold, yet little research exists estimating if those homes sold for significantly more than similar non-PV homes. Therefore, one of the claimed incentives for solar homes - namely that a portion of the initial investment into a PV system will be recouped if the home is sold – has, to this point, been based on limited evidence. Practitioners have sometimes transferred the results from past research focused on energy efficiency and energy bills more generally and, while recent research has turned to PV that research has so far focused largely on smaller sets of PV homes concentrated in certain geographic areas. Moreover, the home sales price effect of PV on a *new* versus an *existing* home has not previously been the subject of research. Similarly unexplored has been whether the relationship of PV system size to home sales prices is linear, and/or is affected by either the size of the home or the age of the PV system.

This research has used a dataset of approximately 72,000 California homes, approximately 2,000 of which had PV systems installed at the time of sale, and has estimated a variety of different hedonic and repeat sales models to directly address the questions outlined above. Moreover, an extensive set of robustness tests were incorporated into the analysis to test and bound the possible effects and increase the confidence of the findings by mitigating potential biases. The research was not intended to disentangle the various individual underlying influences that might dictate the level of the home sales price premium caused by PV, such as, energy costs savings, the net (i.e., after applicable state and federal incentives) installed cost of the PV system, the possible presence of a green cachet, or seller attributes. Instead, the goal was to establish credible estimates for the aggregate PV residential sale price effect across a range of different circumstances (e.g., new vs. existing homes, PV system age).

The research finds strong evidence that homes with PV systems in California have sold for a premium over comparable homes without PV systems. More specifically, estimates for average PV premiums range from approximately \$3.9 to \$6.4 per installed watt (DC) among a large number of different model specifications, with most models coalescing near \$5.5/watt. That

value corresponds to a premium of approximately \$17,000 for a relatively new 3,100 watt PV system (the average size of PV systems in the study). These results are similar to the average increase for PV homes found by Dastrop et al. (2010), which used similar methods but a different dataset, one that focused on homes in the San Diego metropolitan area. Moreover, these average sales price premiums appear to be comparable to the average *net* (i.e., after applicable state and federal incentives) installed cost of California residential PV systems from 2001-2009 (Barbose et al., 2010) of approximately \$5/watt, and homeowners with PV also benefit from electricity cost savings after PV system installation and prior to home sale.

Although the results for the full dataset from the variety of models are quite similar, when the dataset is split among *new* and *existing* homes, PV system premiums are found to be markedly affected, with *new* homes demonstrating average premiums of \$2.3-2.6/watt, while *existing* homes are found to have average premiums of \$6-7.7/watt. Possible reasons for this disparity between *new* and *existing* PV homes include: differences in underlying net installation costs for PV systems; a willingness among builders of new homes to accept a lower PV premium because PV systems provide other benefits to the builders in the form of product differentiation, leading to increased sales velocity and decreased carrying costs; and, lower familiarity and/or interest in marketing PV systems separately from the other features of *new* homes contrasted with a likely strong familiarity with the PV systems among *existing* home sellers.

The research also investigated the impact of PV system age on the sales price premium for existing homes, finding - as would be expected - evidence that older PV systems are discounted in the marketplace as compared to newer PV systems. Finally, evidence of returns to scale for either larger PV systems or larger homes was investigated but not found.

In addition to benchmarking the results of this research to the limited previous literature investigating the sales price premiums associated with PV, our results can also be compared to previous literature investigating premiums associated with energy efficiency (EE) or, more generally, energy cost savings. A number of those studies have converted this relationship into a ratio representing the relative size of the home sales price premium to the annual savings expected due to energy bill reductions. These ratios have ranged from approximately 7:1

(Longstreth et al., 1984; Horowitz and Haeri, 1990), to 12:1 (Dinan and Miranowski, 1989), to approximately 20:1 (Johnson and Kaserman, 1983; Nevin et al., 1999; Eichholtz et al., 2009), and even as high as 31:1 (Nevin and Watson, 1998).

Although actual energy bill savings from PV for the sample of homes used for this research were not available, a rough estimate is possible, allowing for a comparison to the previous results for energy-related homes improvements and energy efficiency. Specifically, assuming that 1,425 kWh (AC) are produced per year per kW (DC) of installed PV on a home (Barbose et al., 2010; CPUC, 2010)⁴³ and that this production offsets marginal retail electricity rates that average \$0.20/kWh (AC) (Darghouth et al., 2010), each watt (DC) of installed PV can be estimated to save \$0.29 in annual energy costs. Using these assumptions, the \$/watt PV premium estimates reported earlier can be converted to sale price to annual energy savings ratios (see Figure 5).

A \$3.9 to \$6.4/watt premium in selling price for an average California home with PV installed equates to a 14:1 to 22:1 sale price to energy savings ratio, respectively. For *new* homes, with a \$2.3-2.6/watt sale price premium, this ratio is estimated to be 8:1 or 9:1, and for *existing* homes, with an overall sale price premium range of \$6-7.6/watt, the ratio is estimated to range from 21:1 to 26:1. Without actual energy bill savings, these estimates are somewhat speculative, but nonetheless are broadly consistent with the previous research that has focused on EE-based home energy improvements.

⁴³ The 1,425 kWh (AC) estimate is based on a combination of a 19% capacity factor (based on AC kWh and CEC-AC kW) from CPUC (2010), and an 0.86 conversion factor between CEC-AC kW and DC kW (Barbose et al., 2010).