

AHJ Resources for Safe Permitting and Inspection of Solar Installations

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the solar and storage industry is seeing many municipal Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJ's) around the country shifting from paper to online solar PV permitting and adapting in-house procedures to allow PV systems to be inspected remotely. Not only are these strategies safer, but they save the AHJ's, contractors and PV system owners time and money.

Virtual Remote Inspections

Virtual remote inspections are conducted between the contractor and an inspector by simply using a video call on a smart phone or tablet using FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, etc. These options do require internet, cell phones, and the adoption of appropriate procedures.

For examples, [North Las Vegas](#), and the [State of New York](#) are among many government agencies that have already taken steps to streamline permitting and offer remote inspections. The [International Association of Electrical Inspectors](#) and [Interstate Renewable Energy Council](#) recently [hosted a free webinar](#) for code officials to discuss how they can continue operating safely using online permitting and remote inspections.

The International Code Council (ICC), as part of their [COVID-19 resources](#) webpage, also has numerous materials, including guidance documents such as [Considerations for Moving Permitting and Plan Review Online](#), [Considerations for Virtual and Remote Inspections](#) and free webinars such as: [Moving to Remote Permitting and Plan Review](#) and [Options for Virtual and Remote Inspections](#). The ICC has also compiled a sample of jurisdictions that have developed guidelines for virtual inspections:

- [Arlington County, Virginia](#)
- [City of Austin, Texas](#)
- [City of Fort Collins, Colorado](#)
- [North Carolina Code Officials Qualification Board](#)
- [North Carolina Department of Insurance](#)
- [Los Angeles County Video Inspection Process and Inspection Guide for PV Systems For One- and Two-Family Dwellings](#)
- [City of Los Angeles Dept. of Building and Safety's "COVID-19 Safety Guidance for Construction Sites"](#)

If you are interested in virtual permitting and inspections, the ICC offers a highly configurable web-based software solution for building and code enforcement officials called [Municipity](#). This software includes permitting, inspection management, mobile inspection, and public access to the permitting and scheduling process. For information please contact Dan Foster, dfoster@iccsafe.org, (855) 436-2633.

The NFPA has also developed a [Remote Video Inspection fact sheet](#), and provides guidance on how to effectively conduct a remote inspections that is based on the "[Conducting Remote Video Inspections](#)" white paper developed by NFPA's Building Code Development Committee.

Free Online Permit Application for Solar Projects

The National Renewable Energy Lab ([NREL](#)) has also been working closely with [The Solar Foundation](#) and Solar Energy Industry Association ([SEIA](#)) to develop an online solar permitting software program that will be FREE to any municipality that would like to use it called [SolarAPP](#). It will incorporate up-to-date codes, certified equipment lists and complete information requirements to insure that the solar installers are knowledgeable and qualified. The SolarApp is being designed to stand alone or to integrate into other online permitting software such as Municipity and should be available by late summer 2020. [Click here](#) to view a webinar explaining how it will work. *The SolarAPP is being tested by AHJ's in May 2020. If you are interested in participating in the testing or adopting the program when it is completed, please contact Jim Boullion, RENEW Wisconsin, jim@renewwisconsin.org.*

Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA)

Here Are Some Options to Consider in Order to Enable Remote Building Permit Approvals

Move application processing to email or online: Set up a phone line and email alias to organize questions and applications centrally or ask around to see if other teams have a platform you could jump into. Use phone and video chat to discuss comments with applicants. Using photos, email, cloud-based file sites and electronic applications will reduce the number of physical files and help you organize the permit queue efficiently.

Move solar application fees online:

- Allow payment online or over the phone.
- If online payment isn't currently feasible, then accept payment by mail or drop box and schedule inspections when it is received AND/OR allow fee pre-payment based on the volume expectations, which can also help with your headcount planning.
- If you don't currently have an online payment system another department like your property tax collection team might or we can help you find a solution!
- Nationally available, solar-specific on-line solutions are coming! Learn about NREL's [SolarAPP](#) development

Consider a one-page permitting application: Determine your most pertinent questions, so that a quick review for the compliant answers can lead to simplified, online approval. One-page permit examples:

- [North Las Vegas](#)
- [New York State](#)
- [City of Oceanside, CA](#)

Inspections

Grant conditional building/electrical permit: By filing the application and paying the fee, a solar installer can receive the permit to build the system as long as it complies with all applicable rules and regulations.

Conduct plan checks and inspections post-install: Conduct plan checks and building/electrical inspections after installation. Benefits of this approach:

- Same safety and design protocols followed before the system is activated, just in a different order and without emphasis on applications that are not actually installed.
- Installers take risk that they are out of compliance, which would be flagged by inspectors.
- Permitting authorities can keep working by email and maintain vital fee revenue.
- Solar workers can continue working and installing systems.

Shift in-person inspections to photos and/or Google Hangouts, Skype, or Facetime: Solar companies (not homeowners) can go into the field and show you everything you need to see via photo or live video or recordings.

- [Photo inspection checklist from NY-Sun](#)
- [North Las Vegas video inspection process](#)
- [Los Angeles County video inspection process and inspection guide](#)

Coming Soon: [SolarAPP web portal](#) to automatically screen applications and issue photovoltaic system permits. The SolarAPP coalition has been working for two years to develop this portal with the goal to foster residential solar adoption by making it easier for cities, counties, and utilities to quickly and safely approve residential solar projects for install and operation on the grid. Our first project is led by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), who is working with an all-star team of experts to build an online permit platform that will enable automated compliance reviews and instant permit approval.