Survey Says 72% of South San Diego Voters Willing to Pay More For Local Solar
Results come from Environmental Health Coalition's outreach to registered voters who live in communities that face burdensome levels of pollution

August 24, 2012 – San Diego, Calif. – More than 72 percent of registered voters in south San Diego say they would be willing to pay more on their utility bill for solar in their communities, according to survey results released today by Environmental Health Coalition (EHC), an organization that combats environmental health issues in San Diego/Tijuana communities.

"The residents that we're talking to say they feel like their bill always increases, but they don't see any benefit in their neighborhood," said EHC Community Organizer Franco Garcia about the survey outreach. "They say they would happily pay more if it would result in something good for their communities." EHC gathered the non-scientific data as part of its outreach to 295 registered voters in the low-income communities of Barrio Logan, City Heights, National City and Sherman Heights. These neighborhoods historically face high levels of pollution compared to other areas in San Diego County.

"We're tired of utility companies claiming that ratepayers will revolt if they see increases in their energy bills," said Nicole Capretz, EHC's green energy/green jobs campaign director. "It's simply not true. Our survey shows that even the lowest income residents would willingly pay ten cents more each month for solar energy in their neighborhoods because they want to raise their families in healthy communities."

Currently, EHC supports AB 1990, a bill that would create small-scale clean energy projects targeted in these communities. Known as Solar for All, the bill would also improve the green jobs outlook in the communities by creating about 3,200 jobs over two years. As a small pilot program, AB 1990 isn't expected to impact rates, but if the program were to expand, some projections say that at most ratepayers could see an increase of up to 10 cents per month on their bills. "We wanted to know if San Diego's low-income communities would be willing to pay that, so we asked," said Capretz about the bill that she expects to get a senate vote early next week. "Overwhelmingly, it seems that healthy neighborhoods are a priority for San Diegans."

EHC's survey results also follow a heat wave that required California's utility companies to issue "flex alerts" encouraging Californians to reduce energy demand in order to maintain power throughout the state. The conservation calls to action combined with existing renewable energy sources allowed the utility
companies to supply enough energy to meet peak demand, even with the San Onofre Nuclear Power Plant off the grid for safety reasons. "This behavior pattern is why we support the priority list of electricity sources set by California's Loading Order," said Capretz. "Energy independence and clean air are a real possibility for the future. We're only scratching the surface of the potential."

According to the Loading Order, California's utilities must first employ energy efficiency and conservation to meet customer demand; then demand response management; then energy from renewable sources such as wind, solar and geothermal. After those supplies are exhausted, then the utilities can purchase power from fossil fuel plants.

To help community members get renewable energy, EHC advocates for urban and rooftop solar power because this localized energy has more potential for low-income communities to increase social equity, environmental quality, energy independence and wealth and job creation.

More about EHC and AB 1990 can be found online at http://www.environmentalhealth.org.

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