

SUCCESS STORY

Continued Tenant Education Helps Residents Maximize SOMAH Benefits



PROPERTY INFO

Emerald Cove owned by Jamboree Housing

ROOFTOP SOLAR

Yes

LOCATION

Huntington Beach, Orange County

YEAR BUILT

1986

UNITS

164

RESIDENT PROFILE

Seniors

PAID JOB TRAINEES

Two, each received 80 hours of training

INCENTIVE

\$344,707

IOU TERRITORY

Southern California Edison

SYSTEM SPECS

System size: **188.9 kW AC**

Solar credit allocation: **92.9% tenant, 7.1% common area**

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Reduces 133 tons of CO₂ emissions per year

Overview

All SOMAH Program projects must provide residents with tenant education prior to the solar installation. This requirement is designed to:

1. Inform community members of the upcoming changes to their environment.
2. Galvanize support for the planned solar installation.
3. Empower residents with knowledge about [energy conservation and bill credits](#) to maximize the benefits of solar.
4. Provide information on paid [job training opportunities](#) available to tenants of SOMAH participating properties.

The program offers several options for disseminating the required tenant education materials, including mail delivery, online information and in-person, on-site workshops. Given the ongoing needs and questions of tenants beyond this required training, the SOMAH Program Administration (PA) has added post-installation continued education to their service offerings. It is designed to help tenants gain a more thorough understanding of the program, adopt further energy saving strategies and maximize SOMAH's economic benefits.

Why Do Continued Education?

Allison Cuff, community engagement coordinator for Emerald Cove Apartments (a 164-unit senior housing community in Hunting Beach, Calif.) contacted the PA about questions residents had

regarding bill credits. Subsequent conversations indicated the need to revisit tenant education materials overall to clear up miscommunications.

"In the beginning, residents didn't have anything. They got a flyer basically telling them 'we're going to be on the roof of your building' ... There wasn't enough information – what are they doing, why are they doing it, how's it going to help me?"

– Allison Cuff, community engagement coordinator
for Emerald Cove Apartments



With support of the [California Environmental Justice Alliance](#) (CEJA), the SOMAH PA conducted two sessions of continued education at Emerald Cove Apartments with 38 residents participating. Session facilitators presented general SOMAH information, explained direct financial benefits for tenants and energy conservation tips to maximize them, and gave guidance on understanding bill credits. Participants were polled about their knowledge of SOMAH before and after the sessions. The following chart showcases the survey outcomes and indicates a notable shift in understanding about the SOMAH Program gained from the sessions.

| Pre-workshop: How familiar are you with SOMAH? | | | Post-workshop: How familiar are you with SOMAH? | | |
|--|----------|------------|---|----------|------------|
| Very | Somewhat | Not at all | Very | Somewhat | Not at all |
| 2 | 11 | 25 | 38 | - | - |

During the question-and-answer portion of each session, residents were eager to learn more about topics including the relationship between billing and credits:

- **“Can solar credits cover my whole bill?”**
Depends on one’s usage and the energy generated; standard energy fees will remain.
- **“Will discount rates, like CARE or FERA, be impacted?”**
No, CARE, FERA and other special rates will not be impacted.
- **“Is SOMAH the same entity as Southern California Edison?”**
No, SOMAH is a statewide program and works with SCE and other investor-owned utilities to get solar on multifamily housing.

- **“Can we now use all the energy we want?”**
No, it is recommended that residents conserve energy to maximize their bill credits – even with solar, excessive energy use can cause utility bills to drastically increase.

In addition to the workshop sessions, the SOMAH PA held on-site office hours for one-on-one consultations to address questions and concerns. Tyler Valdes, SOMAH program manager for CEJA, shared one of his key takeaways from facilitating the event:

“I was surprised by the overwhelming amount of gratitude we received from tenants for demystifying their energy bills and exploring ways to save energy with them. It illustrates the positive impact tenant education has on affordable housing residents when we meet them where they are at, both literally and with respect to their lived experiences.”

Lessons Learned & Moving Forward

Participating in the SOMAH Program is a journey that is often initiated by property owners or contractors, however, the residents living in the buildings are the most impacted for the longest time. It is clear that continued tenant education is an important mechanism for the SOMAH Program to create additional touch points beyond the initial pre-installation education requirements. Gerry Payton, a resident of Emerald Cove and participant of the workshop, explained:

"This [workshop] was excellent because you [facilitators] presented general information explaining everything in detail, and then you went over people's bills with them. Some of them may hear something and may forget or need further explanation. This workshop touched on all five senses and kept people's attention."



Engaging in person-to-person communications before, during and after a solar installation can help counteract potentially difficult situations, such as an unexpected delay between when educational materials are provided and solar installations occur or to inform residents who move in after the project is underway or completed, and to help tenants understanding the intricacies of their new tiered utility rate structures and virtual net metering.

Continued tenant education is a natural evolution for the SOMAH Program as it builds on its foundation of helping environmental justice and affordable housing communities fully understand the benefits of solar power.



The **Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing** (SOMAH) Program provides financial incentives for installing photovoltaic solar energy systems on multifamily affordable housing. The program delivers clean power and credits on energy bills to affordable housing residents. To find out how to bring solar to your community, visit CalSOMAH.org

858-244-1177 ext. 5
contact@CalSOMAH.org



© 2022 Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing Program

Disclaimer: SOMAH makes every effort to present accurate and reliable information. However, the content is presented "as is" without warranty of any kind. Reference to any specific commercial product, process, or service does not constitute or imply endorsement, recommendation, or favoring by the SOMAH Program.