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## **One Block Off the Grid aims to inform about solar power**

**Philadelphia Business Journal - by Peter Key, Staff Writer**

A San Francisco company that seeks to make buying solar-power systems easier for homeowners has begun doing business in the area in conjunction with a Port Chester, N.Y.-based installer of solar-power systems that entered the region in February.



Mercury Solar  
A commercial solar-power system installed by Mercury Solar in Pennsylvania.

One Block Off the Grid launched its group-buying program for solar-power systems in an area comprising Philadelphia and much of the four surrounding Pennsylvania counties two weeks ago.

The company is working with Mercury Solar Systems Inc., which bought Philadelphia-based solar installer Eos Energy Solutions earlier this year.

One Block Off the Grid, which abbreviates its name 1BOG, was founded in 2008 by its CEO, Dave Llorens, to give homeowners an easy way to go solar.

Llorens thought there were a decent number of people interested in seeing if buying a solar-generation system for their home made sense, but many didn't know how or where to start.

He figured that if he gave them a no-hassle place to get information, he could get enough of them in an area to command a group discount from a solar installer.

He also reasoned that solar installers would happily offer discounts to the customers he referred to them and pay him fees for referring the customers to them.

So far, he appears to have been right on all counts.

1BOG has launched programs in 16 markets, including South Jersey, which is separate from Philadelphia, and has gotten 32,000 people to sign up and about 1,000 to buy solar-power systems.

Its programs last three months — the one here started about two weeks ago and runs through Oct. 19. 1BOG wants to get 1,000 people to sign up for it and within four days of its launch it had 450.

Signing up enables consumers to get information about how a solar power system would work financially on their house, but doesn't obligate them to buy one.

"It's extremely noncommittal," Llorens said. "You can go there and get all the information you want before you're willing to talk to anybody."

More than 50 people who signed up for 1BOG's program have agreed to talk to Mercury, said its president, Jared Haines.

Mercury also is teaming with 1BOG on its program in New York, and Haines said the number of leads it gets per week there has almost doubled as a result.

When Mercury bought Eos, it employed 13. Now Mercury's Pennsylvania office employs 20 and Haines is hoping to be able to increase that number to 30 to 40 by the end of the year. Eos' founder, Andrew Kleeman, is running the office as its general manager.

“We’re continuing to grow and expand under Andrew’s leadership,” Haines said.

Mercury also has offices in Connecticut and New Jersey, where it bought Energy Enterprises Inc. of Mays Landing. It employs a little more than 125, Haines said.

So far this year, Mercury has installed about 375 residential solar-generation systems and about 125 commercial ones. Because the commercial systems are so much larger, they provide about 80 percent of Mercury’s revenue.

Haines thinks the market for residential solar-power systems in Pennsylvania is poised to take off, in part because consumers are beginning to understand it better.

He thinks 1BOG’s program will help it take off even more.

“I do think this will boost the residential business in Pennsylvania and it will increase awareness as well,” Haines said.