

Street Juice: Demand Increasing For Secondhand Solar Gear

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Categories:

Homeless encampments are turning to solar panels to get electricity and that is due, in part, to the secondhand market for solar equipment in the Bay Area at places like the Urban Ore salvage yard in Berkeley.

The price for a used panel at Urban Ore is around \$0.30 per watt, about half the price for a new panel from a hardware store. Moreover, buying a panel secondhand can redirect it from the landfill.





Matt Bigler/KCBS Radio

“Solar panels are considered hazardous waste if they are disposed of,” said operations manager Max Wechsler. “However if you can sell them for their original intended use, then they’re not waste. We also accept scrap metals, and we recycle plastics, cardboard and even glass and ceramics too.”

Wechsler says most of their customers are looking to set up a small solar harvesting operation, “folks putting a panel up on their van or their bus or whatever, or just an off-the-grid little system.”

Alex Houlton captains a 49-foot sailboat at the Berkeley Marina and has rigged up four panels that he can raise and lower like a sail.

“Solar panels enable me to run the power systems on my boat without having to run the engine,” or plug into power on land, said Houlton. “My experience is great. I can plug in cell phone chargers, computer chargers.”

“I think everyone — housed or unhoused — should be using solar,” said housing activist Needa Bee.

She points out that while new homes in California are now required to have solar panels, many of homeless are embracing the technology.

“Out of necessity, it could very well be that shanty towns and homeless encampments may be the leading force in going solar.”