

JoCo official worked on state's first solar code

By Stacy D. Stumbo of the Daily Courier

The work of a building safety official may not seem that glamorous but it has its moments.

Robert Rice, Josephine County's building official, spends most of his time making sure local buildings are structurally sound and meet fire-prevention standards. Recently, however, as a member of Oregon's Solar Energy Code Committee, he helped pen Oregon's first solar code.

Rice said solar power is increasing in popularity, warranting the new code. The state generally adopts federal policies and tweaks them in order to meet local needs. But, in this case, no federal code existed.

"This situation was unique," Rice said. "We had to start from scratch."

Patrick Allen, acting administrator for the state's Building Code Division, said the process for adopting a new code is time consuming — it took about nine months to complete — but will benefit the environment and the economy. He said Rice's knowledge of the structural code was invaluable in drafting the Oregon Solar Installation Specialty Code.

The code sets requirements for the installation, alteration, replacement and repair of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems, which generate energy from the sun. PV cells are modular and can last for up to 30 years. Rebates and incentives are available, including a 30 percent federal tax credit, and state and local incentives.

Allen said his part of creating the code was related to installation of photovoltaic systems.

He learned that firefighters have particular concerns about how well-built the systems are because they often need to get up on the roof of a burning structure to combat a blaze.

Rice is a member of the Oregon Building Officials Association. The organization was influential in his involvement in developing the code.

"I really felt it was a good opportunity to show organizations from around the state that we do stuff down here too," Rice said.

Last week, the association acknowledged Rice for his work by naming him "Building Official of the Year."

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TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier
Robert Rice, Josephine County's building official, helped pen the nation's first solar code. These two arrays located off Williams Hwy, produce enough energy during the summer to sell back to the power company.

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