

Property *Matters*

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Hume & Co

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Plug in Solar: What you need to know

New regulations now make it possible for compliant plug-in solar microgeneration systems to be legally connected to standard domestic sockets in Great Britain. Just because the system is compliant, does this give tenants an automatic right to install new equipment at rented properties?

What is plug-in solar?

Plug-in solar is a small electricity generation system that can connect to a standard household socket rather than requiring the type of fixed electrical installation normally associated with conventional rooftop solar.

The new regulatory framework is specifically concerned with solar-only systems with a maximum inverter output of 800 watts. Products must comply with the Government's Plug-in Solar Device Interim Product Specification. Battery storage systems and other forms of plug-in generation are outside this framework.

The location of the panels may also be important. Depending on the property and equipment, panels could be positioned on a balcony, in a garden or attached to or secured against part of the building. The availability and location of a suitable socket, together with the cable supplied with the equipment, may limit where a system can be placed.

There is no battery storage

One important limitation is that these systems are designed to generate electricity while the panels are producing it. They do not, under this framework, incorporate battery storage.

Consequently, the greatest benefit is likely to arise where electricity is being consumed during daylight hours. A tenant working from home, for example, may use more of the electricity generated immediately. A tenant who is away at work for during

the day may use considerably less of it and won't be paid for excess generated.

Generation will also depend on sunlight, season, shading, panel orientation and positioning. Plug-in solar should therefore be regarded as a way of supplementing the household's electricity supply rather than replacing electricity purchased from the grid.

Does a tenant need your permission?

The fact that a plug-in solar product is legally capable of being connected to a socket does not mean that a tenant automatically has permission to install one at your property.

Tenants should check their tenancy agreement and obtain any consent required before installing equipment. As a landlord, you may reasonably want to know what is proposed, where it will be located, how it will be secured and whether it could damage the property.

This is particularly relevant where installation involves a balcony, external wall, railing, roof area, garden structure or other part of the property. You may also wish to consider whether the proposed arrangement could affect your buildings or contents insurance.

For flats and leasehold properties, there may be additional restrictions imposed by the freeholder or management company, particularly concerning

alterations, balconies or external equipment.

Fire safety advice from the London Fire Brigade also recommends that renters contact their landlord, housing provider, freeholder or property management company before purchasing or installing plug-in solar equipment.

What should landlords consider?

If a tenant approaches us with a request to install plug-in solar, we recommend that the request is considered on its individual circumstances rather than being automatically approved or refused.

The fact that a product complies with the new electrical safety requirements does not answer other questions relevant to the tenancy. We may need to establish information such as the compliance of the specific equipment and freeholder and insurance provider's concerns.

Opportunity and expectations

These systems may be popular with tenants as they are relatively inexpensive, potentially portable giving the tenant the opportunity to access electricity cost savings. These systems may be lawful but tenants must still comply with any requirements under the tenancy agreement. Money can be saved, not made, by the tenant, whilst the sun is shining.

Decisions will be on a case by case basis. Whilst this technology is relatively new and will inevitably evolve the need to look after your property remains the same.

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