



For immediate release: July 16, 2013

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The Lower Ninth Ward Leads New Orleans in Solar Capacity

New Orleans, LA – New research suggests that the Lower Ninth Ward is leading the city in solar energy production. Since 2007, ten percent of all solar system permits issued by the City of New Orleans have been for residences in the Lower Ninth Ward, even though the neighborhood contains only two percent of the city's population. According to the report, which was produced by the New Orleans Sierra Club, the Lower Ninth Ward has been issued five times more solar permits, per capita, than has the rest of the city.

Since Katrina, the Lower Ninth Ward has committed to rebuilding sustainably, and solar panels are a symbol of that commitment. Arthur Johnson, Executive Director of the Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development, considers solar an important part of a broader push for environmental friendly development. "People in the Lower Nine recognize that, if we want a vibrant, resilient community, we have to begin at the community level to improve the natural environment, both locally and globally," he said. "Solar is one way people are doing that, and I think this report demonstrates that residents have really embraced the idea of sustainability and seen the benefits it can have for their families and their community."

The report indicates that about twelve percent of occupied homes in the Lower Ninth Ward have permits for solar installations, and the estimated total solar capacity of the neighborhood is 1424 kW. In one day, the neighborhood has the potential to produce about 6025 kWh of electricity.

Robert Green, a Lower Ninth Ward resident, installed solar panels four months ago. "I've been very happy with my solar system," he said, "and it's great to feel like I'm doing something to help the environment."

The increased popularity of solar systems in the Lower Ninth Ward has also helped many residents save money. According to the report, the average solar customer in the Lower Ninth Ward stands to save about \$45 per month on his or her electric bill, and the Lower Nine's total monthly solar energy production nets the community about \$16,267.50 in savings. Reverend Charles Williams Duplesiss, senior pastor at Mount Nebo Bible Baptist Church and long-time resident of the Lower Ninth Ward, said, "After installing solar panels and doing basic efficiency improvement to my home, my monthly electricity bills dropped. That's money I can spend on groceries."

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Moreover, the proliferation of solar systems has significantly reduced the neighborhood's carbon footprint. Over 25 years, the Lower Ninth Ward will prevent almost 39,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere.

Darryl Malek-Wiley, an organizer at the Sierra Club who has been working in the neighborhood for over 15 years, lauds the community for its progress. "Since 2007, the Lower Nine has been a leader in installing solar, and this report highlights their continued leadership."

In the Lower Ninth Ward, the rush to install solar panels shows no signs of slowing. The neighborhood adds more solar systems every year, and, with the solar tax credit set to expire in 2018, many residents are hoping to install systems before time runs out. "After seeing my panels, many of my neighbors have asked me about them and looked into buying them," Mr. Green said. "I think this trend will continue to grow."

The vigor with which the Lower Ninth Ward has embraced solar energy illustrates that small neighborhoods, when they decide to grow sustainably, can have a huge impact on the social and environmental wellbeing of both their local communities and the planet as a whole. Moreover, the report shows that low- and middle-income communities, which are sometimes thought to lack the political power needed to address environmental issues, are in many cases leading the charge for environmental sustainability. In the words of one resident, solar energy is now a "marquee issue for the neighborhood."

About the CSED

The Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement & Development (CSED) was founded after Hurricane Katrina by Lower 9th Ward residents to research and educate Lower 9th Ward residents about how to make the Lower 9th Ward a more stainable and resilient community. They have four areas of focus: 1) built environment, installation of 'radiant barrier' and home energy evaluations ; 2) food security, helping to bring better and healthy food options to the Lower 9th Ward; 3) volunteer coordination, with the 1,000s of volunteers that are still coming to help with the rebuilding and recovery of the Lower 9th Ward, and 4) the natural environment, restoration of the Bayou Bienvenue cypress wetlands. www.sustainethenine.org

About the Sierra Club

The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization with more than 2.1 million members and supporters nationwide. In addition to creating opportunities for people of all ages, levels and locations to have meaningful outdoor experiences, the Sierra Club works to safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying and litigation. For more information, visit <http://www.sierraclub.org>



Solar in the Lower Nine ---- Quick figures:

Total solar permits issued in New Orleans: **2594**

Solar permits issued for the Lower Ninth Ward: **247**

Solar permits for the Lower Nine as a percentage of city total: **10%**

Percentage of homes in the Lower Nine with solar panel permits: **12%**

Lower Nine arrays installed by the Make it Right Foundation: **95**

Residential solar energy capacity for the Lower Nine, approx: **1424 kW**

CO2 prevented from entering the atmosphere by the Lower Nine, approx. (over 25 years): **38,790 tons**

Estimated monthly savings per household: **\$45**

Based on this data, the Lower Nine has over 5 times as many solar arrays per capita as the rest of the city.

All data are for the period between January 2007 and March 2013