
Drive Thru for solar panel thieves?

Just when we thought we were gaining momentum in the effort to get solar panels installed throughout the state, the word from Napa is that thieves are stealing ground-based solar panels from wineries. While the problem may not be widespread yet, it reveals a potential challenge for ground-based solar installations (a topic that Ken mentions in his post here). This problem could be particularly acute for solar panels installed along highways, as Oregon is pioneering. Highway solar panels would be like one-stop shopping for thieves — a thievery drive-thru, if you will.

Why steal solar panels? The prevailing theory is that marijuana growers need them to cut down on their electricity bills. High electricity bills are red flags for law enforcement that a growing operation is underway. These indoor growing facilities require huge amounts of electricity for the lamps and irrigation systems (not that I have any personal experience). It seems unlikely that the panels are being re-sold to consumers because state and federal financing opportunities for solar require the use of new panels. So these thefts may be yet another lame consequence of our failed war on drugs (but that’s a post for drugplanet, not legalplanet). And Rick already posted about the impact of growing operations on our public lands.

Ultimately, the solar industry and its customers will have to find a way to prevent these thefts. Maybe LoJack for solar panels?