



MEDIA CONTACT:
Lesley Hile Ford (Lesley@theprboutique.com)
O: 512-363-5160



Freedom Solar Drives Trend Toward Solar Energy at Texas Auto Dealerships

Automotive Dealerships in Texas and Nationwide are Racking Up Major Savings, Improving Customers' Shopping Experience and Their Sustainability with Onsite Solar Power

Austin, Texas—January 9, 2019. There is an increasing trend among Texas automobile dealerships to go solar, and Austin-based Freedom Solar has emerged as the leading installer of solar panels throughout the state of Texas.

“Over the past three years, Freedom Solar has completed installations at seven auto dealerships across Texas, and we signed a contract last month to complete an eighth this year,” said Freedom Solar CEO Bret Biggart. “That’s over 4,700 solar panels—almost two megawatts of solar capacity—that will save our customers a combined \$5 million over the 25-year lifespan of the systems. What excites me is that this is only the beginning, and we will continue to lead the charge in serving the Texas automotive industry.”

Solar power is a growing trend among Texas automobile dealerships for a number of reasons. Automotive dealerships consume roughly 18 percent more energy per square foot than the average office building, according to Energy Star. Lot and display lighting account for much of this consumption. As manufacturers trend toward electric vehicles, dealerships must add the cost of charging them to their monthly energy bill. Moreover, the building configuration of auto dealerships offers ideal circumstances for solar installations. They are almost always owner-occupied real estate with plenty of roof space to accommodate enough solar panels to produce a meaningful amount of energy.

“More car dealership solar has been installed in 2019 than the prior three years combined,” said SunPower National Auto Industry Manager Ryan Ferrero. “The timing is excellent. Car dealers understand the higher returns from SunPower technology and support from local solar experts like Freedom Solar in Texas.”

The Covert Auto Group was the first dealership Freedom Solar approached in 2016. Although the Covert family was not looking for solar, they quickly came on board when Freedom demonstrated how compelling the economics of solar had become over the preceding two years. Freedom completed solar installations at Covert Chevy-Hutto and Covert Ford-Hutto in 2016. In 2018 Continental Auto Group chose to partner with Freedom to install solar at their Austin Subaru dealership. Barrett Motors went solar at two San Antonio-area dealerships in 2019, Alfa Romeo & Maserati of San Antonio and Jaguar and Land Rover of Boerne, which was the beginning of a rapid succession of dealerships to go solar this year followed by Sames Automotive in Laredo and Lost Pines Toyota-Bastrop. In November, Freedom signed a contract for a solar installation at Keating’s Toyota of Alvin, to be completed in 2020.

In addition to rooftop solar installations, there is a trend among dealerships toward solar carports, and Sames Automotive Group—the oldest automotive dealer in the state of Texas and the first in Laredo to install solar—is one of the dealerships leading the way. Given the state’s long hot summers, solar-powered carport structures solve two problems simultaneously for Texas dealerships: saving on energy costs and allowing customers to shop in shaded comfort, even outdoors. Freedom is also the only SunPower® Master Dealer in Texas. SunPower Corporation is the manufacturer of the world’s most advanced, efficient and sustainable solar technology, designed in the USA and backed by the industry’s best 25-year product, performance and service warranty. As the #1 commercial solar market share leader, SunPower panels are installed on more U.S. commercial rooftops than any other solar panel manufacturer.

“The major reason Texas automobile dealers are moving toward solar is the financial return,” said Biggart. “Solar is an investment that generates cash in a very real sense by producing kilowatt hours of energy. No different than pulling oil out of the ground, it’s an ongoing annuity that allows dealers to fuel future investments.”

Examples of the energy savings Freedom’s auto dealership customers will accrue and their impact on the environment:

- At Austin Subaru, Freedom installed 700 solar panels that offsets 60% of their electricity bill and will save \$857,000 over the 25-year life of the panels.
- The 698 solar panels Freedom installed at Lost Pines Toyota will produce 379,900 kWh of solar power annually, equivalent to taking 30 gas-powered cars off the road.
- The Sames Automotive project involved a 1,260-panel installation, producing enough solar energy to power 60 single-family homes for a year and save the company \$1.5 million.
- Freedom installed 544 panels at Barrett Alfa Romeo and Maserati of San Antonio and 386 panels at Barrett Jaguar and Land Rover of Boerne. The combined systems will generate \$1.2 million in savings over 25 years.
- At Keating Toyota, Freedom will install a 315.6 kilowatt system—an 80% energy offset—for \$739,000 in savings over 25 years.

Another big factor in the decision to go solar now is the federal solar tax credit, also known as the investment tax credit (ITC), which has been a major driver of the rapid increase in solar installations. It allows homeowners and businesses to deduct 26% of the cost of installing a new solar energy system from their 2020 federal taxes. This results in \$7,800 savings on an average-sized \$30,000 residential solar installation and \$26,000 in savings for a business that purchases a \$100,000 installation. There is no cap on its value. The tax credit will drop to 22% in 2021 and 10% in 2022 and beyond for commercial systems. The tax credit will expire for residential systems after 2021.

Freedom Solar is actively pursuing more auto dealership customers in Texas, as is SunPower® on a national level, with an aggressive goal of installing solar at some 20% of dealerships nationwide over the next three to five years.

“The automotive industry has been moving toward greener alternatives for some time now,” said Biggart. “We are proud to be helping dealerships move toward sustainable, cost-effective, environmentally sensitive energy alternatives, dramatically reducing their carbon footprints and improving the reputations of their brands.”

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About Freedom Solar Power

Freedom Solar Power is the leader in turnkey solar installations in Texas, providing high-quality, cost-effective, reliable solar solutions for the residential and commercial markets. Also a Tesla Powerwall Certified installer, Freedom Solar has installed more than 55 megawatts of solar panels since 2007 and ranks number 338 on *Inc.* magazine’s 500 fastest-growing private companies in America. The company has been recognized by Austin Energy as the number-one supplier of residential solar systems in Austin, by GreenTechMedia as the largest residential solar installer in Texas for three years running, and by the *Austin Business Journal* as the fourth-fastest-growing company in Central Texas. Freedom Solar was recently named by the *Austin Business Journal* as a Best Place to Work in 2019 and was ranked 129th on the 2019 Top Solar Contracts List by *Solar Power World* magazine, up from 220th last year. Freedom Solar has completed projects for numerous corporate clients including Whole Foods, Office Depot, Lake Flato Architects, and The University of Texas, among others. For more information, visit <https://www.freedomsolarpower.com>.