



Solar panels on a barren mountain

Should solar panels be installed on snow-covered mountains?

The placement of solar panels on snow-covered mountains can boost the production of electricity when it is most needed -- in the cold, dark winter. Solar-power systems have long been hampered by a seasonal problem: the panels produce more energy in summer than in winter, at least in the mid-latitudes, where much of the planet's population lives.

Should solar panels be installed vertically?

Installing the panels vertically -- which allows snow to slide off -- enhanced their output even more. In the depths of winter, panels placed at an optimal orientation on snow-covered mountains produced up to 150% more power than panels in urban locations, the authors found.

Do solar panels produce more energy in winter?

Solar-power systems have long been hampered by a seasonal problem: the panels produce more energy in summer than in winter, at least in the mid-latitudes, where much of the planet's population lives. To meet the goal of drawing 100% of energy from renewable sources, planners need to find ways to increase winter output.

Why do solar panels work in Switzerland?

High up in the Swiss mountains, the atmosphere is rarer, solar radiation stronger, and in winter the snow can reflect the sunlight. Romande Energie is the company behind the project. According to the founders, the unique alpine conditions are what allow the solar panels to act so efficiently.

How do solar panels work in the Swiss Alps?

Even though we associate having solar panels in sunny and hot regions, panels' efficiency drops remarkably in very high temperatures. So, cooler temperatures are ideal for increased efficiency, which is the case for the Swiss Alps. Also, at this altitude, the sun rays fall just at the right angle on the strategically placed panels.

Could thin air help fill winter solar-power gap?

Arrays sited in thin air could help to fill winter solar-power gap. Solar panels on a ski-lift building in the Alps. Sunlight reflected off snow adds to the efficiency of high-altitude arrays. Credit: Daniel Schoenen/Getty

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