External Disconnect Switch
for Inverter Based Generation

Michael Sheehan, P.E.
IREC
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External Disconnect Switch Overview

• Technical issues
• Practical considerations
• Legal reasons
• NEC vs. NESC safety
• Next steps
What is an External Disconnect Switch?

Meter Base

EDS

PV Inverter
Why is the EDS Issue Relevant?

• EDS could become a cost adder of over 15% of overall cost as PV system costs decline
• Cost to install the EDS can be equivalent to 20 to 40 months of output revenue from a small PV system
• Things (standards) have changed since the “Gardner” PV system early 1980’s
Technical Standards

- U.S. standards are voluntary
- IEEE 929-2000 recommended practice for PV systems (terminated with adoption of IEEE 1547)
- IEEE 1547-2003 Standard for Interconnecting Distributed Resources with Electric Power Systems
- IEEE 1547 was needed but PV is not the same as other DR technologies
- UL 1741 covers inverters, converters, and charge controllers, and interconnected system equipment
Section 4.1.7 states:

“when required by area EPS operating practices, a readily accessible lockable visible-break isolation device shall be located between the area EPS and the DR unit.”

**Bottom line:** removal of the EDS requirement will be done state-by-state
NEC vs. NESC

• National Electrical Code (NEC) is part of National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)
• NEC applies to “utilization facilities” (homes, business and commercial).
• NEC legally mandated in most states
• National Electric Safety Code (NESC) is part of the IEEE
• NESC applies to “supply facilities” (generation, substations and power lines)
NEC Requirements for Disconnect Switches in 690 Section III

• The NEC requirement for disconnects for PV systems are covered primarily in Article 690.
• Generally, NEC requires a disconnect (which can be a breaker) for each source of power or energy storage device in the system.
• Location must be readily accessible - walk up to switch, no ladder necessary, outside the building or nearest the point of entry.
• *These switches include some that are not accepted in the NESC world*
NESC Requirements for Disconnect Switches

• The old NESC states in Section 173C that a visible break disconnect switch is mandatory only for circuits of more than 600 V, and then only if lines may have to be worked on without protective grounding.

• Under “Tentative Interim Amendment 2002-1” NESC has deleted entire rule.

• The need is now justified under “safe switching procedures.”
NEC covers safety operations

- NEC already address the need for switches on PV system
- EDS switch is “redundant” to switches identified in NEC
- NESC does not have “special requirements” for PV generation
- Utility need for an open visible break can be addressed without the EDS
EDS not required for inverter-based systems


- EDS not a requirement in New Jersey or Colorado (see 4 CCR 723-3, Rule 3665, and see N.J.A.C. 14:4-9)
Different Conclusions for the need of EDS

- EDS not required in New Jersey but is required in Maryland?
- One of SMUD’s reasons for eliminating the EDS was the fact that the servicemen do not carry enough locks on service trucks to lockout PV on a circuit. SMUD may have 100-200 PV systems on one circuit.
- No one has identified a need or a problem once the EDS has been eliminated.
Next Steps

• Pursue IREC targeted states to eliminate the EDS in rulemaking proceedings

• Continue to document states, utilities and other organizations that have eliminated the EDS

• Pursue discussions with IBEW and other influencers. Discuss the changes in standards and the elimination of the EDS by states and other organizations.
Michael T. Sheehan, P.E.
7835 85th Place S.E.
Mercer Island, WA 98040

(206) 232.2493
climberlow@hotmail.com