PV Systems and Fire safety in Germany

Säkerhetsaspekter i solenergianläggningar
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PV fire incidents collection for 10 years (until December 2012)

Around 190,000 fire fighting missions each year (Deutscher Feuerwehrverband)

In this period, 350 fires reported, where PV systems had been affected

• in some 130 cases fires are attributed to PV systems
  • (some more 50 cases of heat damage to components)
• in some 220 cases PV systems were damaged by a building fire

PV-Brandschutz Webseite und Leitfaden/Kochbuch “Bewertung des Brandrisikos in PV Anlagen” www.pv-brandsicherheit.de
PV fire incidents collection for 10 years (until December 2012)

- Location of incident – source of damage
- Main root cause

PV-Brandschutz Webseite und Leitfaden/Kochbuch “Bewertung des Brandrisikos in PV Anlagen” www.pv-brandsicherheit.de
PV fire incidents collection for 10 years (until December 2012)

Cases of damaged buildings (63 cases)

- Stand-off systems protected by “hard” tiles (tiles)
- Building integrated systems (BIPV) exposed to fire hazard above average:
  - 1% of the systems but 20% of the damages

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PV fire incidents collection for 10 years (until December 2012)

- Most incidents occurred during installation of first year of operation
- Probably many installation flaws
- Large fraction of electrical defects sparking a fire in general (not only PV) is to be attributed to failing electrical connections → poor contacts are predominant cause of fire!

PV-Brandschutz Webseite und Leitfaden/Kochbuch “Bewertung des Brandrisikos in PV Anlagen”  www.pv-brandsicherheit.de
Fires in Photovoltaic Systems: Lessons Learned from Fire Investigations in Italy

Beware of too fast market growth!

Daten zu Einsätzen aus: Fires in Photovoltaic Systems: Lessons Learned from Fire Investigations in Italy, Luca Fiorentini, Luca Marmo, Enrico Danzi and Vincenzo Puccia, SFPE, 2015

Fire of PV systems

• An undamaged PV-installation that was properly planned and maintained does not increase the fire risk more than any other electrical installation.
Fire safety concept – 4 basic rules

1. Preventing the onset of fire
2. Structural protection – preventing the spread of fire within the building and to neighboring buildings
3. Allow the rescue of people and animals
   - Information and signs for fire fighters.
   - Protection from exposed voltages in the building
4. External access for the rescue and fire brigade
1. Preventing the onset of fire

• PV modules
  • Plan and build according to DIN VDE 0100-712
  • Avoid big induction loops
  • Consider wind and snow loads (and other loads) that can move the panels and set tension on the cables and connectors

• Maintain and update lightning protection
  • Do not over-build!
1. Preventing the onset of fire

- Inverters and combiner boxes
  - Do not install directly on flammable walls (e.g. wood)
    Metal plate over wood is not acceptable!

  → use e.g. a Calcium silicate plate of 15mm thick between the inverter and the flammable wall; keeping a circumferential clearance of at least 10cm around

- Keep the immediate area clear of flammable materials
- Avoid highly dusty places that can affect the ventilation system
- Highly flammable materials must not be present in the room.
1. Preventing the onset of fire

- Inverters and combiner boxes
  - Enough space around for ventilation (follow manufacturers guidelines and Vds 3145)
  - Installation in the stairs and exit area of a single and two-family homes is to be avoided
- Unprotected installation in stairwells of apartment buildings and auxiliary buildings is not permissible
1. Preventing the onset of fire

- DC-cables
  - Avoid damage during installation
  - Keep bending radius
  - Use proper DC cables for PV-installations
    (UV and weather resistant → no cable is UV proof!!)
  - Cables should not be on the floor (water and snow)
  - Problems with Aluminum cables (crimping)
1. Preventing the onset of fire

• Connectors and switches
  • Use adequate DC-switches
  • Improper crimping or connection (lack of tool)
  • Avoid too much tension on the connector
  • Avoid mixed and incompatible connectors
2. Structural fire protection

• The function of firewalls and building separation walls must not be diminished
2. Structural fire protection

- Requirements form the building regulations: Characteristics of the “hard roof” (important for building integrated PV BIPV).
- As well as the use of materials with a classification of at least building material class B” “normal flammability” according to DIN 4102
- Spacing of roof structures to firewalls depends on their fire behavior
- Flammable materials should not bridge this areas
2. Structural fire protection

VdS 2234:2012 - Firewalls And Complex Partition Walls

BW: $\bar{u} \geq 30$ cm

KTW: $\bar{u} \geq 50$ cm
2. Structural fire protection

VdS 2234:2012 - Firewalls And Complex Partition Walls

\[ a \geq 2.5 \text{ m} \]
2. Structural fire protection

VdS 2234:2012 - Firewalls And Complex Partition Walls

\[ a \geq 5 \text{ m} \]
\[ l \leq 40 \text{ m} \]
2. Structural fire protection

VdS 2234:2012 - Firewalls And Complex Partition Walls

- It should have at least the same fire-resistance class
- Should be weather and UV-resistant
2. Structural fire protection

VdS 2234:2012 & MLAR

- Sealing of fire walls penetrations after cable installations
2. Structural fire protection

VdS 2234:2012 & MLAR

- Max 60% of the channel should be filled with the cable bund
- The rest has to be re-sealed to at least the same fire-resistance class

Fire could spread due to the oxygen in the gaps
2. Structural fire protection

- Do not cover heat and smoke vents
- Enough space should be left for maintenance and use in case of fire
- Important to take into account since the planning
3. Protection from exposed voltages in the building

Organizational measures

• Warning sign in the house junction box
• Cabling plan for the fire brigade
• Update of the fire fighting plan

and construction measures

• Installation of DC-cables in fire-resistant ducts/channels
• Installation of DC-cables outside of the building (leaving only AC lines inside the building)
• Inverter and junction box outside of building or right at the entrance (IP class, weather/UV/direct sun protection

or technical measures

• Low voltage installation (<120 V, very unrealistic with PV)
• DC isolation switch:
  • Long-term reliability
  • Fail-safe behavior
  • Secured against restarting
  • Actuator on the house connection
  • Identification of the switch and its state
  • Risk of false “sense of safety”
3. Protection from exposed voltages in the building
3. Protection from exposed voltages in the building

- Non-disconnectable DC-lines within a building longer than 1m should be installed within fire protection channel
4. External access for the fire brigade

Emergency workers must have access to fire source

• Inside attack: Protection against exposed conductors inside the building
• Outside attack: Access to roof

• Escape routes
  • serve primarily as possibilities of escape and rescue
  • serve additionally as access routes for emergency workers

• Observe minimum requirements for access and clearance
  • Allow 1 meter safety clearance from electrically conductive components (in accordance with DIN VDE 0132)
  • e.g. size of "fire escape window": clearance width 90 cm and clearance height 120 cm
4. External access for the fire brigade

North side has no panelling/structures

South side

Go over the north side of the roof

Go over the front side “required window”

Go over the dormer
4. External access for the fire brigade

Panelling/structures on both sides of the roof with no other access option.

Go over the fire break

Flat roof or mono-pitch roof without access options via windows, etc.

Go over the fire break

Smaller 40 x 40 m area and no firewalls
4. External access for the fire brigade

• For larger flat roofs, there should be an access point for each fire compartment (usually 40x40m) around the PV-generators. Route passage widths should not be narrower than 1m.
Jet pipe clearance (DIN 14365-CM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jet pipe</th>
<th>Low voltage (N)</th>
<th>High voltage (H)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIN 14365-CM</strong></td>
<td>≤ AC 1.0 kV</td>
<td>&gt; AC 1.0 kV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>≤ DC 1.5 kV</td>
<td>&gt; DC 1.5 kV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spray jet</td>
<td>1 m</td>
<td>5 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full jet</td>
<td>5 m</td>
<td>10 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>N-1-5</td>
<td>H-5-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Thank you for your attention!

Sources:

• PV- Brandschutz Webseite und Leitfaden/Kochbuch “Bewertung des Brandrisikos in PV Anlagen”
  www.pv-brandsicherheit.de
• BSW Merkblatt für Planer und Installateure “Lichtbogenrisiken an PV Anlagen reduzieren”
  www.solarwirtschaft.de
• VdS 3145 – Photovoltaikanlagen
• VdS 2234 - Brand- und Komplextrennwände, Merkblatt für die Anordnung und Ausführung
• VDE-AR-E 2100-712:2013-05 Measures for the DC range of a PV installation for the maintenance of safety in the case of firefighting or technical assistance
• DIN 4102
• § 30 MBO (Musterbauordnung) – Brandwände
• § 30 MBO (Musterbauordnung) – Dächer
• Muster-Leitungsanlagen-Richtlinie (MLAR)

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