

Public Perception



Image source: <http://stopsmartmeters.org/>

At present many of the general public are not 'buying in' to the concept of Smart Metering.

Wireless Smart Meters

California, USA

"The [California State Public Utility] Commission has received more than 8,000 complaints about PG&E Smart Meters. Statewide, the Commission has received more than 2,000 complaints in the past two months (August 15 - October 15, 2010). Many of the complaints include health, safety and environmental concerns" (Maurer 2010).

In California several local governments have passed ordinances criminalising new Smart Meter installations. Four of seven counties (Lake County, Marin County, Mendocino County and Santa Cruz County), and eight of the thirty-four cities and towns (Capitola, Fairfax, Lakeport, Rio Dell, Ross, Seaside and Watsonville) have done so to date (SSM.org 2011). The Tribal Community of Pomo Indians in California has also banned their use within its tribal boundaries.

The remaining counties there have also taken steps to address concerns on Smart Meter installations:

- In San Francisco its City Attorney, Dennis J. Herrera, filed a petition against the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) in June 2010 to block the installation of more Smart Meters until state regulators conclude their investigation into them. Herrera's prime concern is the accuracy of readings provided by the meters.
- In February 2011, Humboldt County requested that alternative options are identified for customers who decline the installation of Smart Meters by 1st January, 2012.

- In March 2011 The Board of Supervisors of San Luis Obispo County agreed to issue a letter to the CPUC calling for a delay in the installation of wireless Smart Meters in that county until questions about the technology's safety, alleged threat to privacy and cost-effectiveness are answered.

Safety

A number of Californians admit that they have safety concerns over EMF emissions from Smart Meter units. There is presently much confusion and disagreement over the magnitude of the signals created by such units and the appropriateness of safety benchmarks adopted.

As examples of this difference of opinion:

1) There is the official stance from one of the utilities: *"Both the federal government and the international community have deemed the low-level RF on which PG&E's SmartMeters™ rely to be completely safe"* PG&E (2011).

2) Compared with that of others: *"The installation of wireless 'smart meters' in California can produce significantly high levels of radiofrequency radiation (RF) depending on many factors (location of meter(s) in relation to occupied or usable space, duty cycle or frequency of RF transmissions, reflection and re-radiation of RF, multiple meters at one location, collector meters, etc)..."*

Violations of FCC safety limits for uncontrolled public access are identified at distances within 6" [15.2 cm] of the meter. Exposure to the face is possible at this distance, in violation of the time-weighted average safety limits ..." Sage Associates (2011).

The need for further independent testing appears warranted.

Video footage (TIR 2011) additionally indicates that RF/microwave emissions from some Smart Meters may be in excess of what was originally suggested by CCST (2011). For further commentaries on that document refer to Sage Associates (2011).

Some residents state they would be comfortable with a wired Smart Meter, whilst others wish their analogue meters to be retained or reinstated.

In November 2010, the Division of Ratepayer Advocates (DRA) of the CPUC filed documentation arguing that it has a responsibility to ensure wireless Smart Meters do not endanger public health.

The DRA state *“Unless the public's concerns can be put to rest, there is a very great risk that Smart Meter deployment will turn out to be a \$2.2 billion mistake that ratepayers can ill afford”*.

Consumer survey on wireless Smart Meters

An independent survey of 443 individuals evaluated by Survey Design & Analysis (SDA 2011) indicated the following:

- 35% of respondents said they had received increased bills after having the new meters installed.
- 26% of respondents stated they had experienced electronic interference with their radios, mobile phones or cordless phones (15%) and interference with their security systems (11%) since installation of the Smart Meters. 8% said they had experienced burnt out appliances (including TVs, stereos and computers) since the meter installations. Two individuals stated that the meters had caused interference with a medical implant device.
- 49% of respondents claimed they or a member of their household were electrosensitive. The top health issues of 318 respondents since the installation of wireless Smart Meters were: sleep problems (49%), stress, anxiety and irritability (43%), headaches (40%), ringing in the ears (38%) and heart problems (26%).

Statistical testing had revealed the top health symptoms were positively associated with Electrosensitivity and the presence of wireless Smart Meters. The majority of respondents (78%) are from California and share the same utilities provider. Which features of the system might have contributed to the apparent health problems registered remains to be determined. *Refer also to Appendix 1.*

94% of the respondents stated that they wished to retain or have their analogue meters reinstated, with 92% of them stating that they should not have to pay more to do so (SDA 2011).

Optimising public opinion

It appears essential to suitably address public concerns for Smart Meters to have a chance of real success in reducing energy usage. *Refer also to Appendix 2.*

Public perception to Smart Meters appears more favourable in Chattanooga, Tennessee, which uses fibreoptics for its Smart Meters (ICF 2011) - *Refer also to section on ‘Smart Alternatives’*.

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