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Debunking the Dirty (Baker's) Dozen 'Smart Meter' Myths: *Corporate PR v. What's Really What - Why 'Smart' is the New Stupid*

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by James Heddle and Mary Beth Brangan with thanks to Sarah Reilly

As citizen and ratepayer opposition mounts across the country and internationally to the compulsory installation by electric, gas and water utilities of wireless so-called 'smart' meters, the corporate propaganda mill is in high gear.

The industry PR hacks are scrambling to put a green and friendly face on what may prove to rank as one of the stupidest and misguided management decisions of all time. They are attempting to paint those who oppose the plan on valid grounds of privacy, safety, public health, democratic choice and national security as planet-hating 'fearmongers' who are against renewable energy and an upgraded power grid.

We are media activists and organizers in what has emerged as one of the epicenters of 'smart' meter opposition – the Northern California service area of energy giant Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E). We are also 'intervenor' in an 'opt-out' proceeding currently in progress at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), the state's so-far flaccid 'regulatory body.'

We think its time for a little 'truthmongering.' So here's a reality check we hope will clear up some of the industry-sown mis- and dis-information on this important issue.

Myth #1

Wirelessness is Green.

Only a wireless 'smart grid' can save the world from Climate Change and wasteful energy consumption.

Reality

Wirelessness is witlessness.

This top-down, short-term corporate profit scam has nothing to do with reversing long-term, carbon-emission-driven climate change and everything to do with increasing government-funded short-term profit generation at tax- and rate-payer expense. In fact, the huge energy costs of manufacturing hundreds of millions of 'smart' meters outweigh any potential conservation gains. Customer cost savings also are an illusion. Utilities are replacing functioning \$25 analog meters that last up to 40 years with \$100 electronic meters that can last maybe 10 years if you're lucky. Utilities are charging their ratepayers with the enormous cost of the meters, many billions of dollars.

Myth # 2**There IS no alternative**

A wireless ‘smart grid’ is the only alternative (TINA – ‘there is no alternative’) to integrating intermittent alternative energy sources like wind and solar into the total energy distribution system – thus eliminating the need for fossil fueled ‘peaker plants.’

Reality**Safer, more rational load balancing solutions are available.**

Neighborhood and regional ‘peak load balancing’ can be accomplished directly from the power sub stations. It’s not necessary to have devices on each home. Many other ways to accomplish what is necessary for efficient energy supply could be undertaken from decentralized sources if the goals were not first and foremost profit-driven. Some possibilities are small solar panel arrays and savonius rotor wind mills on homes, for example. These could connect in a neighborhood and must be combined with powering down energy consumption. Other reasons given for ‘smart’ grid and ‘smart’ meters are to ensure recharging of electric vehicles. The requirement for the charging to take place on off peak times can be managed through simple notification of proper times, though the huge energy draw to recharge electric vehicles will also actually use more energy than ever saved.

Myth # 3:**Corporations have a mandate for wireless-ness.**

Informed democratic choice is an impediment to technological and economic ‘progress.’ Despite the total lack of informed, reasoned public debate on this issue, unelected government agencies and corporations think they have the right to impose this dangerous and untested technocratic pseudo ‘solution’ on property owners, renters and the general public, world-wide with no legal recourse or democratic choice.

Reality**There is no legal Federal mandate for wireless-ness.**

There has only been Federal ‘stimulus funds’ purloined by utilities and collusive, corporately-captured state public utilities commissions (like California’s CPUC) under false green washing pretenses and regulatory malfeasance. Utilities were mandated to ‘offer’ automated so-called ‘smart’ meters to customers. Automated meters can be implemented by power line, DSL, fiber optics, etc. The reason many utilities are choosing wireless meters is because wireless is cheapest.

Myth # 4:**More ‘consumer choice.’**

A wireless ‘smart meter’ on every home, condo, nomad’s tent and mud hut in the world is the only way to save the planet from climate Change, because it gives ‘energy consumers’ ‘real time’ information and therefore total control of their energy usage.

Reality**‘Smart’ meters do not save energy, smart people do.**

That was shown during California’s corporately-caused ‘energy crisis,’ when citizens spontaneously reduced usage by 10 to 12%. This current top-down, technocratic build-out of untested, unregulated wireless ‘smart meters’ – at un-consulted ratepayers’ expense – actually eliminates hundreds of thousands of meter reader and electrical technician jobs-jobs-jobs, and allows utilities to remotely and instantaneously turn off a ratepayer’s power without prior notice, thus endangering low income and senior ratepayers who are dependent on electrical power for their medical life-support systems. AARP has consistently opposed ‘smart’ meters because of higher costs for those least able to afford it. Sept. 14, 2010. Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn, citing

an excessive financial burden on consumers, “sweetheart deals” and no guarantees of improved service, knocked down legislation that would have paid for the widespread installation of smart meters. No significant energy savings have been shown from the use of ‘smart’ meters.

Myth # 5

Corporate dictate trumps human and civil rights and local authority.

PG&E thinks their corporate fiat supercedes and nullifies individual property owner and renter choices. PG&E believes they can overrule local elected bodies’ rights to protect their constituents health and safety by enforcing their moratoriums on ‘smart meter’ installations.

Reality

Local elected officials are asserting their authority.

So far, forty-seven cities, counties and local jurisdictions have declared opposition and moratoriums on ‘smart meter’ installation in northern California. This amounts to 2,695,947 of PG&E’s 10 million customers – over 25% of its client base. PG&E so far refuses to honor them, claiming superior authority over locally elected officials. Frank Egger, co-author with current Fairfax Mayor, Larry Bragman, of the first Fairfax ordinance, based his legal reasoning on the original Franchise Agreement each utility must sign with a municipality in order to operate within its jurisdiction. This gives the municipality the right to protect their constituents’ health and safety. These are Franchise Agreements that the CPUC has no legal authority to modify, change or eliminate. Cities and counties have certain constitutional powers granted to them and those that have adopted SM moratorium or outright bans are on firm legal footing, according to Frank Egger who was seven times elected Mayor of Fairfax.

Myth #6

SMs only emit 45 seconds per day and their radiation is less than a cell phone.

Reality

SMs emit constant, hundreds of thousands millisecond long, ‘chirps’ and ‘chatter’ 24/7 to stay in touch with the other meters in the neighborhood ‘mesh network’ and the local ‘data collection point.’ Plus, according to UCSC radiation scientist Dan Hirsch of the Committee to Bridge the Gap, the whole body exposure from ‘smart’ meters is 100 times that of a cell phone.

Myth # 7 If you oppose a wireless ‘smart meter’ on your home, you hate the planet.

Reality

People who love the planet oppose wirelessness.

Informed individuals opposing this energy & carbon loading intensive, profit-driven plan are truly defending the long-term viability of the planet with no ulterior motives.

Myth # 8

There are no human health impacts from wireless radiation.

There are no demonstrated human health effects to RF emissions and ‘dirty electricity.’ ‘Electro-Sensitivity’ is just an unproven, pseudo-ailment made up by suggestible hypochondriacs, and self-serving ‘junk’ scientists.

Reality

Scientific reports and personal experience proves otherwise.

Several thousand people have sent written complaints of adverse health impacts from the meters, imploring utilities to remove them. Many have actually had to leave their homes because of severe adverse health effects from ‘smart’ meters. At least 3 – 7% of the population is already electro-sensitive and many more will become so after being overexposed to the constant pulsing of high frequencies emitted by these

wireless meters. No one is impervious, some are more sensitive than others. Some symptoms are: ringing in the ears, nausea, headaches, insomnia, heart palpitations, joint pain, brain fog, anxiety. The millions of pulsing meters are causing a massive new overlay of RF pollution to our already densely polluted air, wires and ground from cell phone antennas, radar, wi-fi, and the myriad other wireless devices. The World Health Organization's agency for cancer research, IARC, on May 31, 2011 classified the same radio frequencies used by 'smart' meters as a class 2B carcinogen, like DDT and lead. This is an outrageous precedent that corporations would be allowed to force installation of a device emitting a class 2B carcinogen on homes and private property.

Myth # 9

No privacy risks.

There are no individual privacy or security risks posed by wireless 'smart meters.'

Reality

Wirelessness MEANS hackableness.

Any thief or teenager with an iPhone could access your data. Once PG&E has your and everyone else's it can market them to advertisers for data mining, thus increasing its profits at ratepayers' expense. Government agencies have already made arrests based upon data gathered by 'smart' meters.

MYTH # 10

No safety risks.

There are no home or public safety risks posed by wireless 'smart meters.'

Reality

There are many reports of fires, explosions and appliance damage.

They are reportedly caused by either faulty meter installation or incompatibility with home wiring. Installers are not electricians and have inadequate training of only a couple of weeks. 'Smart' meters are not UL certified. Several businesses and even a shopping mall have reported fires and many people report fried electronics with 'smart' meter installation. The inevitable occasional power surges can also cause complete destruction of the electronics in smart meters necessitating more expensive repair from the more extensive damage to household wiring and appliances than that experienced with analog meters. This just happened to 10 square blocks in San Jose. Medical devices, such as pacemakers and other medical implants can also be dangerously interfered with, as well as motion detectors. Arc fault interruptors and other safety devices can also be tripped by the 'smart' meters.

Myth # 11

No accuracy risks.

There are no over-billing risks posed by wireless 'smart meters.'

Reality

Wrong again.

Just ask the many people of Bakersfield, Fresno and many other places who have seen increases in their bills by as much as 300%.

Myth # 12

No cyber-war national security risks.

There are no national security energy grid hackability risks posed by wireless 'smart meters.'

Reality

Cyber Warfare is already happening and the energy grid is vulnerable.

IT cyber-security architects and no less an authority than former CIA Director James Woolsey say a wireless energy net is totally vulnerable to hacking and therefore ‘really stupid.’ Any teenage hacker in a cyber cafe in Beijing could potentially bring down the entire wireless North American energy grid. Lockheed-Martin and the International Monetary Fund have been hacked. It will be far easier to disrupt a system with so many easily accessible targets as millions of vulnerable wireless meters in a mesh network.

Myth # 13

PG&E can be trusted to put the public good before profit.

PG&E and other ‘regulated monopoly,’ IOU companies are model ‘corporate citizens’ with the maximum public good and interest uppermost in their ruling value systems above share-holder profitability considerations.

Reality

PG&E’s corporate rap sheet spans its history.

In fact, a case could be built that PG&E has been – as California state legislator Tom Ammiano has put it – a ‘corporado’ from its very founding in 1905. Its values and vision that ‘competition is destructive’ can be traced directly to the Robber Barons of the 19th century. Shortly after the Great Earthquake and Fire of 1906 all members of the Board of Supervisors, the police chief, as well as corporate officers of PG&E were indicted for graft and bribery. It was PG&E’s shoddily maintained gas streetlight system that helped burn a huge swath of the city in 1906, a preview of the recent San Bruno fire. The company is a transnational giant with holdings around the country and the world and has been a fierce opponent of locally owned municipal power and a major promoter of nuclear energy. It remains a huge force in both California and national politics.

[For a partial timeline of its offenses, see companion blog post here: *PG&E’s Rap Sheet...So Far – Portrait of a ‘Corporado.’ Investor-Owned Utilities Aren’t Called ‘IOUs’ for Nothing...*
<http://eon3emfblog.net/?p=3506>]

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