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California's Latest Revolt: Against Smart Electric Meters

By [ALEX SALKEVER](#) Posted 9:00 AM 07/19/10 [Energy](#), [Technology](#), [Economy](#), [General Electric](#), [Green](#), [Cisco Systems](#)Comments: [54Print](#) Text Size [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)[Email](#)[More](#)

Sometime in April, Pacific Gas & Electric ([PCG](#)) put a brand new "smart meter" on the home I rent in Marin County, Calif. We were never notified or asked if we wanted one. The installer just came one day while we were out, and it was a done deal. As a confirmed environmentalist, I thought this should have been a good thing. Smart meters will, in theory, play a key role in managing energy consumption by households like mine.



PG&E Corp.

The devices are wireless, so they eliminate the need for meter readers and save companies like PG&E money while reducing the carbon footprint and pollution resulting from running fleets of trucks to tally power usage at millions of homes. Smart meters also can show a homeowner patterns about energy usage and even notify them about energy usage anomalies or spikes in power demand.

Smart meters will ultimately allow for more dynamic pricing in electrical power and for communities like Southern Marin, where I live, to make a choice to reduce power on days when the grid is near capacity due to a heat wave, while it remains reliably cool in my neck of the woods.

Dangerous Side Effects?

All of these goals seem laudable and logical. Yet there is a brewing [smart meter revolt across the Golden State](#). Last week, the [Marin Realtors Association](#) called for a halt to all new smart meter installations in Marin County. Their rationale? They feared the smart meters would increase the levels of electromagnetic radiation around homes. This would give buyers pause and reduce real estate values in the already depressed (by historical standards) market. The former hippie enclave of Fairfax, located in Marin, has [passed an ordinance to ban smart meters](#).

This revolt, however, is hardly the exclusive province of the NPR set or the real-estate mafia. In several counties in the politically conservative Central Valley, thousands of homeowners have claimed that the new smart meters caused rapid spikes in their electrical bills, even though their power consumption remained relatively constant. (The utilities blamed those spikes on fast increases in the cost of power during particularly toasty periods.)

Other homeowners have said they don't want another source of radiation (meaning, radio waves) near their homes, considering the steady increase of all manner of electromagnetic-emitting devices from WiFi routers to cordless phones to garage-door openers. These are often the same homeowners who react suspiciously to new cell phone towers in their neighborhoods, a topic that has become increasingly contentious. Even though engineers generally say there's no risk, at least a handful of influential doctors have chosen to reserve judgment on the topic.

Privacy Invasion?

Running underneath many of the objections is uneasiness with the "Big Brother" aspect of smart meters. Do we really want the utility company to know when we're home, when we're washing or drying our clothes, whether we're taking too many showers (or not) or probing for other "energy saving" insights that could eventually come from smart meter technology as it heads toward a logical conclusion of monitoring every electrical outlet in a home?

This has resulted in some surprisingly strong reactions from homeowners. Some have put locks over their electrical meters to prevent the switch. Others

call the smart meter push an invasion of privacy and "Un-American."

The California Smart Meter Revolt hasn't slowed the rapid development of smart-meter technology, with dozens of companies bringing to market smart-meter systems that provide more granular detail and instant-message reminders, or consoles showing real-time energy usage to homeowners. Those include stock market titans such as General Electric ([GE](#)) and Cisco Systems ([CSCO](#)).

But Next Time, Please Ask

Smart meters will eventually prevail. But visceral reaction against these gadgets, particularly by the Prius-driving, tree-hugging set of Southern Marin County -- arguably one of the more liberal parts of California, if not the country -- certainly hints at the high barriers smart meter makers face in gaining acceptance and overcoming a wall of suspicion and fears of invasions of privacy.

As for me, I didn't make much of a stink about the new meter. These things are, after all, good for the environment. Glitches are to be expected. I realize most of my privacy is already gone. But anytime a big company comes and installs a wireless device that measures what's going on inside my home without notifying me or explaining what is happening, that's a different issue. And in this case it's enough to make me want to tear the thing out and toss it on the trash heap.

Tagged: [carbon footprint](#), [electric grid](#), [electromagnetic radiation](#), [environment](#), [environmentalism](#), [environmentally friendly](#), [Pacifi Gas Electric](#), [PGE](#), [power consumption](#), [privacy](#), [privacy issues](#), [smart meters](#)

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Senior Technology Writer

Alex Salkever is a columnist for DailyFinance, covering Silicon Valley from his perspective as an executive at a clean-tech start-up. He formerly worked as a senior research director at DeMatteo Monness where he oversaw technology coverage and hybrid research for the firm's hedge fund and mutual fund clients. Prior to that, Salkever was the technology editor for BusinessWeek.com. He was also the site's Apple columnist. He is based in San Francisco.

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Fixeman

7:49PM Jul 19 2010

these are known as vampire meters here,if you can read it from city hall,it can be manipulated from there also

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MUSIK711

7:32PM Jul 19 2010

I heard they are really just some new spy technology that they are tryi ng out!

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7:32PM Jul 19 2010

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Sonicswordsman@hotmail.com

7:24PM Jul 19 2010

- 1) "Monitoring" and "Rationing" are two different concepts.
- 2) Are you saying that efficient appliances are the route to a totalitarian government?
- 3) The government does not own Facebook or the gps satellites, which can only monitor certain devices anyway.
- 4) The government did not install these devices either.
- 5) The meters do not control or mandate anything. They don't seem to do anything that normal meters don't already do.
- 6) Wasn't a mandate for auto insurance in place a lot longer than a mandate for health insurance?
- 7) If you don't like that laws of this land, you are free to go away and find another one.
- 8) Take a chill pill, and stop listening to Glenn Beck.

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(1 RATINGS)

BAILEE4273

7:18PM Jul 19 2010

I live in California. When my so called smart meter was installed, my PG&E bill went up over \$200 dollars. The same thing happened to a number of people I know. I called PG&E to complain and they were very blunt saying that it is working fine and rushed me off the phone. The next month after I called them it went back down to normal. Now they are finally starting to admit that they "may" have "some" smart meters that are malfunctioning. Yeah, no s#\$% !?! Some one needs to look into these crooked b@#\$%^@s and start getting our money back. The problem is government and polititions are in their back pocket.

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(3 RATINGS)

CJSOOO

6:37PM Jul 19 2010

Who are you? For once a person that knows what they are talking about. Bottom line is a increase in electric use to you, the customer. Air condition at midnight, shower at 4 AM, thats customer savings!

Chuck

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Jctwizzer

6:33PM Jul 19 2010

that's got the be dumbest, most naive, uninformed, stupid opinion I've seen on the net

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(3 RATINGS)

Wdfisher57

6:32PM Jul 19 2010

This is all just the beginning of the ultimate enslavement of the American people by the folks disguising themselves as progressives. These sheeple types enjoy the feel of the collective yoke and unjustifiably want the rest of the public to experience that same feeling of being controlled, too. These meters will one day be used to ration the use of electrical power that you use each day. Kinda fits in well with the "lets all buy more efficient appliances and tv sets", doesn't it? The modern pc youth culture (in my opinion the most diabolical brainwashing success used on such a wide group of people in this countries history) has also spawned the unquenchable percieved need for more and more intrusion into everyday life by the government (the use of Facebook and gps equipped mobile devices being prime examples). In my opinion, w have got to start to realize that this is just the path that has been cynically devised by the powers that be to ultimately assert total control on the peoples daily lives by identifying the remaining cross section of individualist non compliers ouyt there, the ones that used to make up the majority of this once proud land, and then phoneying up laws and new regulations designed to make them guilty of failure to comply and thus give legal cover for law enforcement types to take them to court and force them to bend to the governments will. Years ago the isolationists predicted a set of ***** (when communists where still the bogeyman) could be devised that would set this exact political situation into motion. The books 1984 and Animal Farm seem quite relevant in todays America where the laws are ignored along with the will of the people by the governing class in Washington DC. They always seek to frame this total disdain in the "its in your best interests" dialouge. which our complicit and compliant media outlets respew each evening on their propaganda programs formally known as the news hour. Two years ago the liberal left propaganda against GW Bush was routinely using the provisions within the Patriot Act as an example of right wing control, yet in basically 19 months of dictatorial control over the federal government, what was consideral extreme encroachment on ammerican civil liberties, has been dwarfed by the policies the Democrats have designed and passed into law. The act of purchacing insurance coverage is no longer an option to decide about, it is now a govt. mandate. The IRS can now legally peruse your banking statements to make sure you are fully in compliance with these new rules of the land. That these bills weren't even bothered to be read or the policy details even worked out in a minimalist fashion of detail before they were voted on and the signed into law is the most disturbing aspect of this whole power grab. November's elections are the only chance left for the average people to retake control of their ***** unfortunately just that simple folks. We have to wrestle back the control these neophytes have determined themselves in control over. The author of this fluff piece seems incapable of understanding the slippery slope his sheep like acceptance of these intrusions sets the country on a path down. His attitudes are the biggest problem we all have to surmount.

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MARGIESMEMORIES

6:19PM Jul 19 2010

Well Alex these Smart Meters have been advertised on television and inserts in your PG&E bill. So nobody has snuck up on you. Bill inserts have mentioned these meters for months and also on the internet.

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(2 RATINGS)

FrobeseTF

5:48PM Jul 19 2010

SnowMassey

The un-Americans that do drugs are the problem...Talk radio scares no one. It is the lies they tell every day that scares me.

#####

I agree with you about the people who use drugs. But that won't change because they are arresting the wrong people.

If you think Talk Radio is spreading lies call, and confront them with facts, and logical reasoning derived from those facts.

B.S. cannot stand up to the cold hard light of facts. So I will repeat my challenge. If you think you have a good reasoned argument that is backed by fact have some guts, and call his radio show, and make a fool of him. In public. Show the world just how stupid his arguments are. Stop complaining about him, and DO something about him. You have as much right as anyone else to call his show, and expose his lies, and faulty logic to the world. If you can.

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