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## Take this SmartMeter, or else.

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POSTSCRIPT: I spoke this afternoon with Charles Pine, the Oakland resident who made the recording discussed below. He offered more details to the story.

About 45 minutes after their initial conversation, the PG&E representative returned to Pine's home. He handed Pine a small card with a number to call for more information on SmartMeters. He still didn't mention the delay list, Pine said, but his attitude was less confrontational than before

"He just said, 'I wanted you to have this card,"" Pine said. "He was not offering an alternative."

The flip side of the card did show the number PG&E customers can call to be placed on the delay list, (877)743-7378. But Pine didn't notice that until today, when he took a second look at the card

Pine has multiple concerns about SmartMeters. He worries that the digital meters, which can track electricity use in great detail, will lead to higher bills down the road. He questions the security of their data and the possibility that hackers may try to access that info. And he wants their possible health effects investigated.

He stresses, however, that he doesn't have a problem with the PG&E representative himself.

#### ON SECOND THOUGHT:

Also today, Mark Toney from The Utility Reform Network sent an e-mail saying that he misspoke yesterday. His group is not, after all, convinced that PG&E has the right to cut off service to a customer who refuses a SmartMeter.

Instead, the state rules on the matter "are unclear and open to dispute," he wrote.

Still, Toney remains convinced that PG&E's authority to cut off service isn't the main point here. Faced with skeptical customers, the company should try to win their support, not threaten them, he said.

#### **ORIGINAL POST:**

Pacific Gas and Electric Co. has a list for people who want to delay getting a wireless SmartMeter.

But you wouldn't necessarily know that from the following conversation.

The grass-roots group Stop Smart Meters posted on its web site today an audio recording of what the group says is an Oakland man telling a PG&E installer that he doesn't want the new meters on his duplex. The installer's response: accept the meters or PG&E will cut off your service.

Nowhere in the 2-minute, 46-second conversation does the installer mention the delay list. Instead, he says "either we install it, or you find another energy company."

You can listen to it here.

Now, granted, the delay list promises only that -- a delay.

Put your name on the list, and PG&E won't install the new meter on your home until the California Public Utilities Commission votes on the company's SmartMeter opt-out plan later this year. Under the plan, all PG&E customers would still receive a SmartMeter, but the company would turn off the transmitters for people who consider wireless technology a health threat.

Even if it is only a delay, however, the company's representatives are supposed to offer that option. They shouldn't threaten the customers with disconnection, said spokesman Jeff Smith.

"If our meter installer actually made that statement, it does not reflect our policy, and it should not have happened," he said. "Right now, if customers have a concern about the wireless technology and they want to delay installation, they can do that."



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Joshua Hart, director of Stop Smart Meters, questioned whether disconnecting a customer over refusing a meter is even legal. A spokeswoman for the CPUC -- the arbiter of such issues -- could not be reached Tuesday.

But Mark Toney, executive director of The Utility Reform Network, said his consumer advocacy group researched that question a year ago after hearing that PG&E had threatened to disconnect other customers who didn't want the new meters. The company, he said, appears to have the authority to cut those customers off.

"What we found out was that, you know, according to the tariff, they have the right to do so," Toney said. "What's surprising is that PG&E is on the record saying they would not do so."

Even if the company has that right, he said, disconnecting customers who refuse SmartMeter installation would be a bad way to convince people to trust and accept the new meters.

"It's not a good strategy to win over customers by threatening them," he said.

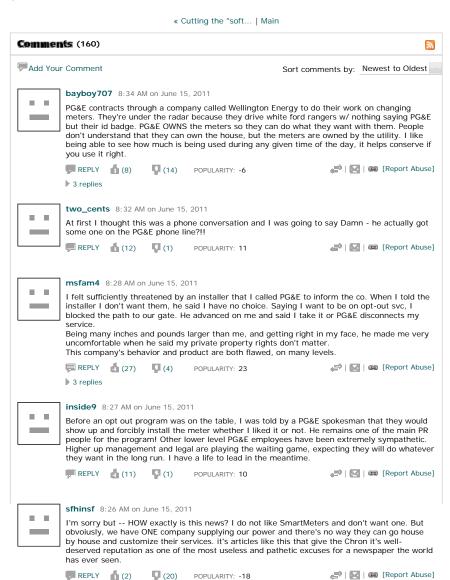
The taped conversation once again illustrates the very different ways that PG&E and its critics see the SmartMeter. The company sees a new piece of equipment, much like any other piece of equipment used in providing electricity service. Critics see a device they don't trust stuck on their houses against their will.

Is this taped conversation an isolated incident? Or have some of you had similar conversations with PG&E's representatives? Post a comment below, and let us know.

-- David R. Baker

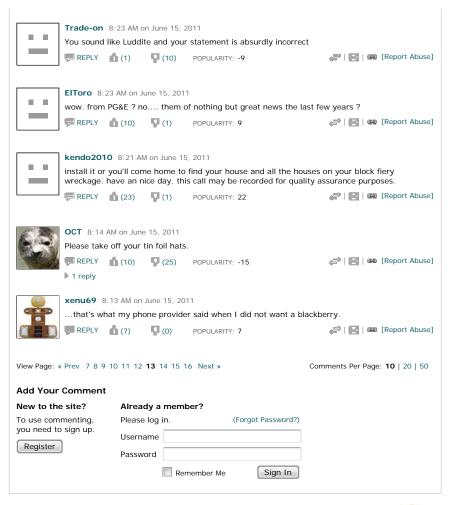
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