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PG&E SmartMeters

Humboldt Beacon

Updated: 11/22/2010 11:34:41 AM PST

PG&E SmartMeters represent the wave of the future for efficient ways of collecting data on utility use, but critics say that the meters tend to cost energy consumers more, are invasive and pose health risks.

SmartMeter moratorium in Fortuna defeated

Councilman Glaser's plea rejected

Franklin Stover

Humboldt Beacon

The PG&E SmartMeters being installed on millions of American homes use a combination of radio frequencies and cell phone networks to gather usage data, transmitting it back to PG&E every hour. PG&E maintains that the meters will allow customers to better understand their energy use and will ultimately lead to greater energy savings. PG&E is looking at spending \$2.2 billion to implement 10 million meters in the state.

But not everyone is sold on that promise. Fortuna City Councilman Dean Glaser is a critic of the new technology and presented his plan for a ban on SmartMeters at the Monday, Nov. 16, council meeting. Modeled after an ordinance passed in August by the Town of Fairfax, the ban would not have amounted to a permanent banishment of SmartMeters, but a moratorium that would have lasted six to twelve months. It is uncertain what the short-lived moratorium would accomplish.

Councilmember Ken Zanzi, who did not agree with

the moratorium, explained that the gesture might be "symbolic at best," but more importantly, "a waste of the City's staff time," echoing the sentiments of City

Manager Duane Rigge.

But Glaser was not completely alone in his criticism of the SmartMeter technology, as Councilmember Berti expressed interest in the ordinance and approximately 15 citizens arrived to voice concern.

Asking Glaser if homeowners can still reject the SmartMeter, Glaser advised residents to post a No Smart Meter sign on their electric meter globe and gas meter.

"This will only delay the inevitable," Glaser said, adding, "This is pure intentional dictatorship with the end result of higher utility costs and a negative health hazard meant to shorten your life span."

Glaser said that the ordinance in place in the Town of Fairfax offered the best protection possible because it placed a moratorium for 12 months.

In addition, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has received petitions from the City and County of San Francisco and other municipalities that want to delay implementation of the meters in Central and Northern California. The Town of Fairfax adopted the "emergency ordinance" (No. 752) calling it an "urgent" matter.

In the council's findings, the Town of Fairfax concluded that PG&E did not comply with Section XIV of General Order 131-D of the California Public Utilities Commission which requires a utility to consult with the local jurisdiction on land use matters prior to locating its facilities.

The Town of Fairfax memorandum adds that energy usage data which is measured moment by moment,

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"allows the reconstruction of a household's activities: when people wake up, when they come home, when they go on vacation, and even when they take a hot bath." The memorandum continues with concerns about privacy as well as health concerns with the spread of increased electromagnetic frequency radiation (EMF) emitted by the wireless technology in the meters, and FCC safety standards do not exist for chronic long-term exposure to EMF radiation.

choice whether or not a Smart Meter is to be installed on my home or business."

Violations of the Fairfax Moratorium may be charged as infractions or misdemeanors. In addition, violations can be deemed public nuisances, with enforcement by injunction or any other remedy authorized by law. Wellington Energy, a subsidiary of Pittsburgh-based Wellington Power is charged with installing the PG&E SmartMeters nationwide.

Getting back to Fortuna, Councilman Zanzi said that it's important to understand that the current administration in Washington is pushing the SmartMeter agenda nationwide, "and anything we do at the local level would not change that movement. What I do object to is blaming PG&E for this intrusion in our lives. PG&E, like many utility companies across the United States are being forced to deploy Smart Meters for both Electric and Gas services," Zanzi said.

"I am not against the technology as this type of electronic equipment is pervasive in our country, that is, cell phones, microwave ovens, computer routers, desk top wireless telephones, and yes, City of Fortuna remote read water meters. So, don't put the problem on PG&E," Zanzi said.

Zanzi added, "Opponents should be directing their energy to our representatives at the State and Federal level. The entire issue for me boils down to "choice." I can chose to use or not use RF generating appliances. In this case, I don't have a

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