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Marin County supes OK moratorium on SmartMeters

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The Marin County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday approved a one-year moratorium on the installation of Pacific Gas and Electric Co.'s SmartMeters, siding with residents who consider the wireless devices a threat to their health, privacy and pocketbooks.

"It's a way for us to tell PG&E that we want you to stop implementing this until the risks are better known, and it's a way to tell our citizens that we hear them," said county Supervisor Charles McGlashan before the vote.

The moratorium, which covers the unincorporated portions of the county and was approved 4-0, is largely symbolic.

Although other local governments have tried to ban SmartMeters, authority to stop their installation rests with the California Public Utilities Commission. And the commission has so far rejected all calls to halt PG&E's program, saying that any pause would add to its \$2.2 billion cost.

Marin County officials, however, hope that their vote will persuade San Francisco's PG&E to delay installation in their county, where opposition to the new gas and electric meters is growing. Two women were arrested last week for blocking a caravan of meter installation trucks driving into Inverness.

Health risk feared

Opponents consider the meters' wireless radiation a health risk. They also question the meters' accuracy and say the devices collect too much personal information.

Marin County officials are betting that PG&E, its public image battered by September's fatal pipeline explosion in San Bruno, won't want the negative publicity that would come from continuing installations in spite of the moratorium. The company paused installation in other communities that passed temporary SmartMeter bans.



"They honored Fairfax's request, they honored Santa Cruz (County's) request, and we hope they'll honor ours as well," McGlashan said.

He announced during Tuesday's board meeting that he will submit his name to Gov. [Jerry Brown](#) to fill one of the openings on the utilities commission, a position that would give him regulatory power over PG&E.

Despite the vote, a PG&E spokesman on Tuesday suggested that the utility may continue installations in Marin County.

7.3 million installed

After Santa Cruz County supervisors approved a temporary SmartMeter moratorium in September, PG&E delayed installations there to give the company more time to meet with community members, said spokesman Jeff Smith.

The company, which has installed more than 7.3 million SmartMeters to date, says the devices will let customers track their energy use with precision and help them save power.

In Marin County, PG&E has already held about 35 community meetings and open houses, Smith said. The company, therefore, doesn't need to pause the program, he said.

"Continuing the program will allow all our customers to enjoy these benefits," he said.

A bill introduced by Assemblyman Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, in December would force PG&E to offer its customers a choice between receiving a wireless SmartMeter or an advanced meter that would transmit the same data through a wired connection. In addition, PG&E reported last month that it is considering some kind of opt-out alternative for customers who don't want the meters, although the company has not yet specified what the alternative might be.

For now, Marin County residents opposed to the meters expressed satisfaction with the supervisors' vote, and warned PG&E not to ignore it.

Opposition growing

"If I were their public relations (person), I would not go back to west Marin," said Katharina Sandizell, a mother of two arrested Dec. 29 for blocking an installation truck. "Once two of us got arrested, seven people were ready to get arrested the next day. It's a groundswell, and they know it."

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