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SmartMeter installation to begin soon in S.F.

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Pacific Gas and Electric Co.'s controversial SmartMeters are coming to San Francisco.

The utility plans to begin widespread installation of the wireless electricity and gas meters within the city during the next few weeks, starting in the Marina district. PG&E mailed letters to Marina residents on Tuesday, notifying them that their old meters would soon be replaced.

In the coming months, the company plans to install 620,000 of the devices throughout San Francisco. PG&E has already installed 7.3 million SmartMeters elsewhere in Northern and Central California.

The transition, however, has triggered a backlash. Some critics question the meters' accuracy, while others believe that wireless signals from the devices threaten public health.

Last year, San Francisco city officials unsuccessfully petitioned the California Public Utilities Commission to halt SmartMeter deployment throughout PG&E's service territory. Both Marin and Santa Cruz counties have voted to impose moratoria on SmartMeter installation, even though they lack legal standing to do so.

PG&E has scheduled a series of informational meetings in the Marina district, hoping to allay any residents' concerns about the devices.

"What we've found is that as customers become aware of the benefits, some of them are even excited about getting the SmartMeters," said company spokesman Jeff Smith.

But Joshua Hart, with the group Stop Smart Meters, said the company may not find San Franciscans receptive.

"I would not be at all surprised if there was direct action to stop deployment," he said. Three people have already been arrested in Marin and Sonoma counties trying to block SmartMeter installation trucks.

Some San Francisco homes have already received SmartMeters, usually when their older meters needed replacement. PG&E chose to start widespread San Francisco deployment in the Marina



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district because relatively few homes there have their meters behind locked doors or gates, Smith said.

PG&E's informational meetings for Marina residents will be held tonight, Tuesday through next Thursday, and Jan. 29 at 1593 North Point St. in San Francisco, with each meeting scheduled to last from 4 to 7 p.m.

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