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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.

"I don't blame the employee personally," Pine said. "They're probably under a lot of pressure to install those meters."

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

Posted By: [David R. Baker \(Email\)](#) | June 15 2011 at 06:01 AM

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bayboy707 8:34 AM on June 15, 2011

PG&E contracts through a company called Wellington Energy to do their work on changing meters. They're under the radar because they drive white ford rangers w/ nothing saying PG&E but their id badge. PG&E OWNS the meters so they can do what they want with them. People don't understand that they can own the house, but the meters are owned by the utility. I like being able to see how much is being used during any given time of the day, it helps conserve if you use it right.

REPLY
 (8)
 (14)
POPULARITY: -6
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[▶ 3 replies](#)

two_cents 8:32 AM on June 15, 2011

At first I thought this was a phone conversation and I was going to say Damn - he actually got some one on the PG&E phone line?!!

REPLY
 (12)
 (1)
POPULARITY: 11
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msfam4 8:28 AM on June 15, 2011

I felt sufficiently threatened by an installer that I called PG&E to inform the co. When I told the installer I don't want them, he said I have no choice. Saying I want to be on opt-out svc, I blocked the path to our gate. He advanced on me and said I take it or PG&E disconnects my service. Being many inches and pounds larger than me, and getting right in my face, he made me very uncomfortable when he said my private property rights don't matter. This company's behavior and product are both flawed, on many levels.

REPLY
 (27)
 (4)
POPULARITY: 23
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[▶ 3 replies](#)

inside9 8:27 AM on June 15, 2011

Before an opt out program was on the table, I was told by a PG&E spokesman that they would show up and forcibly install the meter whether I liked it or not. He remains one of the main PR people for the program! Other lower level PG&E employees have been extremely sympathetic. Higher up management and legal are playing the waiting game, expecting they will do whatever they want in the long run. I have a life to lead in the meantime.

REPLY
 (11)
 (1)
POPULARITY: 10
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sfhinsf 8:26 AM on June 15, 2011

I'm sorry but -- HOW exactly is this news? I do not like SmartMeters and don't want one. But obviously, we have ONE company supplying our power and there's no way they can go house by house and customize their services. it's articles like this that give the Chron it's well-deserved reputation as one of the most useless and pathetic excuses for a newspaper the world has ever seen.

REPLY
 (2)
 (20)
POPULARITY: -18
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- Trade-on** 8:23 AM on June 15, 2011

You sound like Luddite and your statement is absurdly incorrect

REPLY
↑ (1)
↓ (10)
POPULARITY: -9

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- EIToro** 8:23 AM on June 15, 2011

wow. from PG&E ? no.... them of nothing but great news the last few years ?

REPLY
↑ (10)
↓ (1)
POPULARITY: 9

 [Report Abuse]
- kendo2010** 8:21 AM on June 15, 2011

install it or you'll come home to find your house and all the houses on your block fiery wreckage. have an nice day. this call may be recorded for quality assurance purposes.

REPLY
↑ (23)
↓ (1)
POPULARITY: 22

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- OCT** 8:14 AM on June 15, 2011

Please take off your tin foil hats.

REPLY
↑ (10)
↓ (25)
POPULARITY: -15

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▶ 1 reply
- xenu69** 8:13 AM on June 15, 2011

...that's what my phone provider said when I did not want a blackberry.

REPLY
↑ (7)
↓ (0)
POPULARITY: 7

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