

SMART METERS: Are They Really That Smart For You?



In the last several years, smart meters for electricity have been installed to replace the old dial-type electric meters. Touted as the latest and greatest in technology, with customers allowed to access their actual electric consumption on a real-time basis, are they really helping you or are they really helping the utility companies?

In our experience, the only ones benefitting from these smart meters is the utility companies, whose long-term goals are to have everybody paying [real-time pricing](#) within the next 10 years, not to mention the fact that they can reduce their payroll expenses substantially by no longer employing meter readers. In addition to this, they are now denying all-lighting rate schedules to all-lighting customers, based solely on the smart meter data, which shows daytime use, even if that daytime use is attributed only to clouds covering the sun on cloudy days! But don't just take our word for it, [read what other people have to say](#).

Why are consumers reporting dramatically higher utility bills after smart meters are installed?

Higher than normal utility bills and overbilling due “inaccurate” smart meters have led to lawsuits, including two class-action lawsuits in Bakersfield, CA, and Texas. [As you read these news reports and complaints](#), you'll be alarmed to learn that even though consumers are shifting their energy use, reducing energy consumption and making their homes more energy efficient, their utility bills have suddenly doubled or tripled. You'll be saddened to hear the tragic stories of families who can't meet these new higher bills and must choose between either feeding their kids or paying the utility bills, or are resorting to ice-age living, turning off the heat and resorting to candles. You'll also be angry to learn how the current billing, customer service and field accuracy testing standards and practices are inadequate and failing consumers. They are grossly unacceptable, and affecting consumers' quality of life. Our families and seniors are already stressed and burdened trying to survive and manage in today's hard-pressed economic times.

Is it true that your bill goes up after getting a “smart” meter?

Many people have experienced hikes in their utility bill after a “smart” meter was installed. [A recent survey](#) published on EMFSafetyNetwork.org documented how many people have received higher bills—over one third of those surveyed. [Here’s another account of the overbilling issues.](#) Here is [another article](#) about a group of residents that are suing PG&E over steep price hikes after smart meters were installed.

Some of the most common consumer complaints from a September, 2011 [survey titled ‘Wireless Utility Meter Safety Impacts Survey’](#) are as follows:

“In the beginning I called all around, talked to many people about my concern. I was told I had no choice - the meters are going in and I have no say. No one addressed my concerns or called me back to address my concerns as I had left messages and asked. Anyone who I spoke with to address my concerns skated right past them and told me the same thing, I have no choice but to have a SmartMeter installed.”

“My interaction with PG&E has been entirely focused on keeping them from installing meters on my home. Each time I have called, I get only arguments that they are safe, no way to guarantee that we can opt out.

“I have been thinking of contacting PG&E, but I dread it knowing that it will increase my already elevated stress levels. I’m feeling very frustrated and stuck. I’ve thought about taking a sledge hammer to the meter at some points.”

“SCE basically told us that there was nothing they could do to help us. My husband has emailed every executive at SCE and CPUC and nobody will reply back. I even got a letter from my Dr. about my EMF/RF sensitivities and SCE said that they have no contingency plan for people with EMF/RF sensitivities or health problems that are caused by their Smart Meters.”

“They do not care about the long-term health of their customers. They are a 100% monopoly, and the CPUC is their lapdog. This situation stinks.”

What can I do to bring down my utility bill?

If you’ve addressed the above possibility that it is your “smart” meter itself that is to blame, you can think about ways to cut your usage. Saving energy is not a difficult thing to learn, and certainly doesn’t require a ‘smart’ meter, special software, or hourly data! It does need some awareness and willingness to change. [Learn to read your meter.](#)

The no-tech way to do it: read the tag or sticker on appliances to find out what the electrical usage draw is. Look for how many watts a device uses. For example, your blowdryer (a big draw) might say “1600W” on the side, your crock-pot (a low draw) might say “150W” on the bottom. Cut down your use of high-draw appliances. Electric clothes dryers and air conditioners are two big energy-hogs. Line-drying clothes is one easy way to shave off a chunk of your electric bill.

Some appliances require a little multiplication. Your vacuum cleaner or dishwasher might only give other numbers, because their draw is variable during usage. Find the V or volts, and the A or amps. Multiply these to get an approximation of the watts. My vacuum, for instance, says 120V and 12.0A. That makes 1440watts, also a big draw. Knowing which items in your house draw a lot of electricity and which don't, you can change or reduce your own usage. When you go to replace an appliance, look for the “Energy Star” rating to see how efficient it is. Choosing a smaller fridge or a HE (high efficiency) washer are two changes that can help when it's time to replace your old ones.

Although there has been a big push by utilities and governments to use compact fluorescent bulbs, these have serious health and environmental risks of their own- they contain mercury and other toxic substances and emit high levels of electromagnetic radiation. We recommend LED bulbs if you can afford them, or use incandescent bulbs, turn them off when you leave the room, and go to sleep with the sun!