

Smart Meter Scandal

BC Hydro, enabled by Liberal Government, uses exorbitant opt-out fees and threats to cut off electricity, to force smart meters on citizens, while ignoring evidence of health risks and safety hazards.

by Richard Caniell

BC Hydro rightly receives much of the blame for forcing Smart Meters on British Columbians; but the primary responsibility lies with the Liberal government, which used the Clean Energy Act to force BC Hydro to switch to Smart Meters. This same legislation barred the BC Utilities Commission (BCUC) from reviewing the Smart Meter Program, and this blocked the public consultation that would have accompanied a BCUC review.

Smart meters use wireless transmission to send meter readings direct to BC Hydro. They have allowed Hydro to dismiss nearly 300 meter readers. Meter readings are why we pay our hydro bills, yet when the meter readers are fired, do hydro bills go down? No, they are going up as BC Hydro shifts the cost of the smart meters onto its customers.

The increase in electricity bills is expected to hit 26% by 2016, and this is because the government opened all our rivers to private power producers, then forcing BC Hydro to buy almost all its new power from them. Further, BC Hydro has been ordered to provide new infrastructure such as transmission lines for mines, gas-fracking and LNG plants.

Thus we, the public, are partially subsidizing the capital costs of these private companies. Experts further warn that Hydro will be selling electricity to these corporation much cheaper than what it will pay to acquire the power from private sources. According to the *Vancouver Sun*, BC Hydro is now buying electricity at double the cost of its industrial power rate. (Calvert, Cohen, Sept 5, 2013) We will pay the deficit.

Meanwhile, BC Hydro is raising funds by "efficiency" measures such as firing 300 meter readers and shifting the cost of the smart meters onto the consumers. Anyone who refuses a smart meter, due to concern about health and safety hazards, is then slapped with yet further exploitative fees, forcing them to pay the cost of having their meters read. Low-income people who have no hope of paying the extra fee must then accept the health risks of a smart meter.

Exorbitant Meter-Reading Fees: Doing the Math

Statistics provided by the COPE union (V. Sun, Sept 26, 2013) indicate that 389 meter readers (only half of them full-time) formerly served approximately 1.8 million households.

Of these households, 19,380 have chosen to keep their old analogue meter. These people must pay \$32.40 monthly, or \$389.00 per year to have their meters read. A further 440 households chose to have a Smart Meter with the transmission turned off, which also needs to be read. These people must pay \$20 monthly, or \$240.00 per year. In total, BC Hydro will take in \$7,647,000.00 a year to read 19,820 meters.

According to the Union, BC Hydro retained 70 meter readers. Our meter reading fees would pay each of them \$109,240 per year, or about \$9,000 a month! Since this is inconceivable, it appears that the fees are exorbitant and punitive, designed to force people to accept a smart meter.

Elsewhere in Canada, Ontario's ombudsman has received 7,900 complaints against Ontario's Hydro One regarding ir-

regular billing connected to smart meters.

50 Doctors Confirm Health Risks from smart meters

When I sent a letter to BC Hydro expressing concern about the potential effects of the Smart Meters on health, BC Hydro replied:

"Planetworks Consulting, a North Vancouver engineering firm, has conducted independent testing confirming that BC Hydro's smart meters communicate for about 1.4 seconds per day. In fact, the exposure to radio frequency from a smart meter — over its entire 20-year life span — is less than a single 30-minute cell phone call."

This summation may be true, but it omits crucial details pointed out by Dr. David Carpenter, former founding Dean of the School of Public Health at the University of Albany. His letter, printed in *La Maison du 21e siecle*, was signed by more than 50 international experts in EMF radiation. It stated:

"Wireless smart meters typically produce atypical, relatively potent and very short pulsed RF/microwaves whose biological effects have never been fully tested. They emit these millisecond-long RF bursts on average 9,600 times a day with a maximum of 190,000 daily transmissions and a peak level emission two and a half times higher than the stated (US) safety signal. Thus people in proximity to a smart meter are at risk of significantly greater aggregate of RF/microwave exposure than with a cell phone."

Dr. Carpenter's letter said claims that research has proven smart meters to be safe are false. He stated: "In fact, only a few such studies — two dozen case-control studies of mobile phone use, certainly not thousands, have reported no elevations of cancer, and most were funded by the wireless industry. In addition, these reassuring studies contained significant experimental design flaws, mainly the fact that the populations followed were too small and were followed for a too short period of time.

"Non industry-funded studies have clearly demonstrated a significant increase in cancer cases among individuals who have suffered from prolonged exposure to low-level microwaves, transmitted notably by radio antennas..."

"A wireless smart meter produces radiofrequency microwave radiation with two antennas in approximately the same frequency range (900 MHz to 2.4 GHz) as a typical cell tower. But, depending on how close it is to occupied space within a home, a smart meter can cause much higher RF exposures than cell towers commonly do. If a smart meter is located on a common wall with a bedroom or kitchen rather than a garage wall, for example, the RF exposure can be the same as being within 200 to 600 feet distance of a cell tower with multiple carriers."

Saskatchewan revokes smart meters for causing fires

After ten fires originating from smart meters, the Saskatchewan Minister responsible for SaskPower ordered an immediate stop to smart meter installations and further ordered that 105,000 smart meters already installed be removed and replaced with the old meters.

This follows the same problem occurring in Pennsylvania (2012) where they halted having meters replaced due to 29 fires. The manufacturer for the meters in Saskatchewan and Pennsylvania, Sensus, claimed that the problems creating the fires are "systemic in the industry".

The proof of his statement is that fires have also been reported from other brands of smart meters; for instance, Portland Gas Electric is now removing 70,000 smart meters because of fires. Smart meters have been linked to 23 incidents reported to Ontario's Fire Marshal from 2011 to 2013, which included 13 small fires.

BC's negligence in failing to track smart meter fires

Globe and Mail, July 31, 2014:

"BC Hydro ... said there has been no evidence of fires started by smart meters."

"BC Energy Minister Bill Bennett said he's not aware of any problems with the meters."

According to a recent investigative report by the Coalition to Stop Smart Meters, the 2012 Incident Summary of the BC Safety Authority actually implicates smart meters in ten fire incidents.

The Coalition documented a scandalous failure of the BC government to track fires caused by smart meters. The use of the *Clean Energy Act* to exempt smart meters from oversight by the BC Utilities Commission left the public with no protection from these dangers.

The Coalition to Stop Smart Meters also reports that, according to the Safety Standards Act, Sec. 36, "nothing must be taken from the scene of the fire until the fire inspector has given his approval. BC Hydro has removed smart meters before the inspector has been able to do his job, and without approval."

Meanwhile BC Minister of Energy has said it is "unfortunate" that Saskatchewan revoked the smart meters in response to the fires. Was there ever such a shameless admission by a BC Government, as to its support of corporate profit over the safety of its citizens?

Final gun-to-the-head: electricity cut-off notices

Some residents who have refused a smart meter have been charged the monthly fee to have their meters read since December, others since April. But the smart meters weren't working correctly. Hydro used past records to estimate what the smart meter owners owed, yet continued to charge the fees to those who opted out. Yet it quickly became apparent that the old meters weren't being read either. Many people refused to pay the extra meter-reading fee.

BC Hydro acknowledged the problem, and declared that it would credit people for months in which their metre wasn't read (Valley Voice, 16 July 2014). However, talking out of two sides of its corporate mouth, BC Hydro sent written letters threatening to disconnect electric service to those who deducted the legacy fee.

Some weeks later, some of these people received an automated telephone message stating "your electricity

will be cut off in 24 hours" —and the fee Hydro is charging to reconnect electricity is \$355.00! While acknowledging that the meters may not have been read and that a rebate may be due, Hydro was threatening those who didn't pay it with electricity cut off and a punitive fee to reconnect it!

In the five instances about which I learned of persons who received this 24-hour notice, three of the parties are on disability, and can't afford the fee they feel forced to pay. One of those individuals phoned Hydro and was told no additional time was allowed. Then, within a day of this threatening phone call, these parties receive the written notice stating that credit may be owed them for as much as nearly half the sum demanded. No one knew exactly what they owed or how many times their meter had or had not been read, but BC Hydro was demanding the full, admittedly excessive, amount within 24 hours.

The persons to whom I spoke, fearing the \$355.00 reconnection fee, gave in to Hydro's extortionate threat. Those on disability assistance, under considerable duress, borrowed the money to pay Hydro.

This disgraceful situation demands the widest possible exposure and denunciation. Will Hydro shut off my electricity, an 82-year-old man recovering from a cancer operation, on the basis that I will refuse to pay what Hydro admits is an uncertain and excessive charge? My refusal, aware that the meter is on the outer wall of the room in which I spend most of my time, means to protect my health based on health and fire hazard reports that Hydro dismisses in so self-serving and arrogant a fashion.

BC Hydro controls the power which it threatens to shut off, but what is the source of that power? Is it not derived from publicly owned rivers and the damming of them? How did Hydro arrive at the position to threaten and extort the public, using public waterways for their profits, except that the BC government supports these indefensible wrong means?

The full scope of research on wireless transmission yields two contradictory results, with the majority of evidence indicating serious health risks. Because of this, BC Hydro and the Liberal government are in no position to assure anyone that smart meters are safe. Hydro's position is entirely self-serving and willfully blind in completely ignoring substantial adverse science as to smart meters. Instead it tells us, "Don't worry, trust us."

It doesn't have to be this way. In 2012 the legislature of the state of Vermont passed a law forbidding utilities from charging for opt-outs. People can decline a smart meter and even have one removed and replaced with an old-style meter for free.

Despite Hydro's false assurances and threats, including their extortionate charge of \$355 to reconnect my electricity, I won't pay their fee. Now then, we desperately need legislators, investigative reporters and the authorities concerned with equities to protect an undefended public which includes myself.