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Smart meters rolling out soon —Sara Miles

BC Hydro says they plan to start installing smart meters this summer in the Northern Interior of BC and then make a start on the rest of the province this fall. They plan to have all meters installed by December 2012.

Many people are raising health and privacy concerns related to the planned smart meter installation. BC Hydro says it will work with customers on a case-by-case basis to address any concerns about the smart meter initiative.

Gary Murphy, Chief Project Officer, BC Hydro Smart Metering Initiative, claims there are tremendous amounts of misinformation that are causing unnecessary fear and anxiety. 'At the end of the day, people have to make their own choices but we think this [the smart meter initiative] is a great thing, and we are absolutely convinced that it is safe.'

Murphy says there are a couple of very important distinctions to make: a smart meter has 1/100 the power output of a cell phone, and 'we won't be putting smart meters next to our heads'.

'Our intention is not to install these meters in a confrontational way,' he says.


Suggested solutions to customer concerns include moving their meter deployment to the end of the installation period, doing more tests, and relocating a meter farther from a living area; because exposure drops exponentially with distance from the source. He says they are also looking at ways to minimize the amount of time

that the computers will transmit data to less than one minute per day.

Apparently, mandatory time-of-use billing has been taken off the table because the most recent assessment of longterm capacity planning shows the system has enough capacity for peak demand periods. This capacity includes forecast energy production from Site-C. BC Hydro might still offer voluntary time of use rates however, for those who see the benefits of charging more for power when it is in higher demand.

BC Hydro claims that a 'smart' grid will allow early theft detection, 'voltvar' optimization (a process whereby the utility can monitor voltage at points on the grid and effectively use less energy from generating stations), and improved customer awareness and interaction; thus saving an estimated \$70 million-worth of electricity. This will delay a rate increase for three years and allow important infrastructure upgrades.

A web portal is planned that will allow customers to monitor their electricity usage hourly. Moreover, the meters are bi-directional, so it will be easy for customers to sell electricity back to the grid—currently an expensive and complex process in BC.

BC Hydro encourages concerned customers to contact the call centre (1-800-224-9376). See also 'Letters', page, 4. 

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