# In California, Exploding "Smart Meters" Spy on Your Water Use

Government's latest [Orwellian tools to spy on citizens, known as "smart meters,"](#) are literally blowing up and catching fire, risking lives and property to facilitate what even officials acknowledge amounts to intrusive state surveillance. In fact, your home may already have been fitted with one of the dangerous meters in recent years. The latest explosions of the controversial espionage devices, used to monitor citizens' electricity and water usage, happened in California last week. Amid a [government-caused water shortage across the state](#), bureaucrats are hoping to use the hazardous meters to catch citizens consuming more than their government-approved water rations. As [more and more "smart" meters explode and burst into flames](#), though, citizens concerned about safety — not to mention privacy and liberty — are increasingly fighting back.

According to local news reports, more than 5,000 homes in Stockton, California, were left without power late last month after the smart meters on the houses exploded. "Neighbors in the South Stockton area described it as a large pop, a bomb going off, and strong enough to shake a house," reported CBS13 on its website. Resident Brad Abernathy was quoted as saying that his neighbor's electricity receptacles "are all blackened" from the event. Apparently the blasts and resulting damage were caused when a truck crashed into a utility pole and two wires touched, producing a power surge that blew up the [unstable meters.](#) The damage reportedly varies by house, and a spokesperson for the utility said that home appliances may have also been damaged in the surge. Electrical panels were being replaced as well.

Of course, as *The New American* [reported just last year](#), Stockton's exploding espionage devices are hardly unique to that city. In fact, all across the United States, Canada, and beyond, the deeply controversial meters for electricity have been randomly catching on fire and even exploding. The scandal became so huge that one Canadian province with exploding meters — after politicians ignored widespread citizen concerns and foisted the dangerous meters on the populace — ended up forcing authorities to start removing all of the more than 100,000 devices. They were reportedly replaced with the older analog meters that permit far less surveillance. In Oregon, after numerous reports of the meters catching on fire, officials announced that over 70,000 smart meters would be replaced. Taxpayers, of course, have been stuck with the mounting bills. With dozens of smart meters going up in flames in Pennsylvania, at least two homes there also caught on fire.

After a series of fires and explosions involving the meters last year, one of the top manufacturers of the

"smart" monitoring devices, taxpayer-funded North Carolina-based Sensus, sparked even more controversy with a stunning admission. "Our experience has shown that these issues are systemic in the industry," Sensus President Randy Bays admitted in a statement at the time, giving even more credence to the widespread safety concerns expressed by critics of the smart-meter rollout. Of course, with public outrage growing over the dangers and politicians forced to respond, Bays was trying to deflect responsibility over the fires from his firm. Still, he is hardly the first to suggest that the dangers of smart meters are, in fact, "systemic" in the industry.

But why are governments around the world — and especially in the United States — putting the lives and property of citizens at serious risk by imposing smart meters on the population when the dangers are already well-documented? A partial answer, at least, emerged this week in drought-stricken California. That state, as *The New American* reported on April 7, is facing water shortages blamed on radical Big Government policies that prevented the construction of reservoirs for decades under the guise of "environmentalism." To deal with the self-inflicted crisis, the smart meters will be used, just as opponents warned, to monitor and control citizens' water usage across California — a notion that was ridiculed by the establishment and its media organs as fear-mongering. Governor Jerry Brown recently issued an executive order purporting to mandate fines for citizens who use more than their "fair share" of water by, for example, watering their lawn or taking long showers. To enforce the rationing schemes, officials will be relying on data from smart meters — and they are boasting about it in public.

"It collects the data every five minutes, then after midnight, the cellphone that's built in here comes on, makes one call, and calls it in to the database that we and the customer, through a password security system, have online access to their consumption," Long Beach Water Department General Manager Kevin Wattier was quoted as saying after using smart meters to bust a local business that "overwatered" its lawn. "The accuracy is just incredible, because we get the data the next day." Using data collected by the warrantless-surveillance meters, Wattier said he knew exactly when to send out his employees to gather videotaped "evidence" of the "infraction." "We are using it specifically for an enforcement tool to go after those customers who we've gotten lots of complaints about," the water boss continued, adding that smart meters would be used to target homes and businesses alike.

Of course, such lawless surveillance and control over citizens is precisely what critics of smart meters have been warning about for many years — among myriad other concerns. "Smart Meters are designed to provide government with detailed information on your energy use, your movements in your home, the way you use your personal private time, and even how many people are in your home at any given time," explained Tom DeWeese, chief of the liberty-minded American Policy Center. "It is an unconstitutional invasion of your home by government, as set down in the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution."

Even government bodies have acknowledged the threat to privacy posed by the meters. "If law enforcement officers obtained near-real time data on a consumer's electricity usage from the utility company, their ability to monitor household activities would be amplified significantly," the Congressional Research Service said in a 2012 report about the meters. "For example, by observing when occupants use the most electricity, it may be possible to discern their daily schedules." If a criminal accessed that information — a relatively simple matter for somebody with hacking skills — they would know, for instance, what time would be best for a robbery or murder. On the other side of the Atlantic, meanwhile, the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS), an official European Union body, has also sounded the alarm about the meters, warning in a 2012 report that they enable "massive

collection of personal information" on households that is "thus far unprecedented in the energy sector."

Explosions, fires, and the vast new opportunities for espionage, though, are hardly the only concerns surrounding the controversial devices. There are also major potential health risks, according to experts. Among the biggest health concerns (other than being burned alive) is the emission of pulsed radio-frequency (RF) radiation by the meters. The American Academy of Environmental Medicine, among others, has called for caution. "Multiple studies correlate RF exposure with diseases such as cancer, neurological disease, reproductive disorders, immune dysfunction, and electromagnetic hypersensitivity," the Academy said on its website about the radiation emitted by smart meters and other devices with similar technology. "Genotoxic effects from RF exposure, including studies of non-thermal levels of exposure, consistently and specifically show chromosomal instability, altered gene expression, gene mutations, DNA fragmentation and DNA structural breaks."

The rollout of the devices in the United States, unsurprisingly, was funded in large part by billions of American taxpayer dollars through the 2009 "stimulus" scheme passed by Democrats in Congress and demanded by Obama. "It will make our grid more secure and more reliable," Obama claimed at the time while announcing the stimulus-funded "Smart Grid" scheme. As awareness of the risks posed by smart meters to the health, safety, rights, and privacy of citizens continues to grow, it is hardly unreasonable to suspect that taxpayers may once again be forced to fork over large sums of cash — only this time, it will be to reverse the boondoggle. It may take more homes burning down due to smart meters — potentially with the occupants inside — before politicians admit the enormity of the fiasco they foisted on the people who pay their salary. But while it may be expensive to undo the damage, the health, safety and constitutionally guaranteed privacy of the American people are worth the price.

*Photo: AP Images*

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