



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on August 13, 2014

In U.S. and Canada, “Smart Meter” Fires Spark Alarm

All across the United States, Canada, and  beyond, [deeply controversial “smart meters”](#) for electricity have been catching on fire and even exploding, sparking a major scandal that in at least one Canadian province has forced authorities to start removing all of the more than 100,000 devices. In Oregon, utility officials also announced that tens of thousands of smart meters were being replaced following numerous reports of fires. With the manufacturer saying the problems are systemic in the industry, experts predict more disasters to come as governments continue foisting the “smart grid” on the world in the face of growing opposition.

With the latest news of fires and explosions, it now seems to critics and politicians that in the frantic rush to impose the “smart” electric meters in defiance of public resistance, serious safety concerns were pushed aside — along with growing fears about the health and privacy implications surrounding the technology. With the latest news about the potentially deadly consequences, officials across the continent are scrambling for answers, and taxpayers are likely to be stuck with a massive bill.

A series of at least 10 fires in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan attributed to the digital electric meters, which have stirred fierce resistance in some areas due to health and privacy concerns, prompted utility provider SaskPower to announce that it would be removing all of them. The recalled meters will be replaced with the older, lower-tech analog meters that cannot be monitored or controlled remotely. After initially dismissing the widespread safety concerns raised by critics, politicians responsible for the mess, under heavy fire from activists, are now claiming to be concerned as well.

“I think the concerns about safety are paramount here, the concerns are significant enough, anytime families are at risk in Saskatchewan, actions have to be taken and that’s why we’ve directed SaskPower accordingly,” explained Bill Boyd, the provincial minister of Energy and Resources, who ordered the utility to remove the smart meters after the fires. “I don’t know whether there was enough testing done. We’ll certainly be conducting, along with SaskPower, an internal review of the procurement procedures around this, around the safety concerns people had.”

Officials say they intend to get to the bottom of the fiasco to identify the culprits as well. “We want to determine when these were originally ordered, if there were safety concerns known at that point in time, so we have a lot of questions we’re going to be discussing with SaskPower about how this came to be,” Boyd was quoted as saying in Canadian media reports. “We view it as similar to a recall situation and the people of Saskatchewan shouldn’t be responsible for the costs of this and we’ll do everything we can to recover those costs.”

Estimates suggest the removals will cost around \$15 million and should take six to nine months to complete, according to news reports. Other figures suggest the price tag for the entire fiasco could be



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as high as \$50 million. So far, nobody has taken the blame, including the manufacturer of the fire-producing meters, North Carolina-based Sensus. The company blamed “external factors,” such as “water intrusion,” “hot socket conditions,” “over voltage in the distribution system,” and “holes in meter boxes” for the fires. It also said investigations were underway.

“Our experience has shown that *these issues are systemic in the industry* and we are committed to delivering solutions that help our customers to overcome these challenges,” said Sensus President Randy Bays in a statement, giving even more credence to the widespread concerns expressed by critics of the smart-meter scheme. (Emphasis added.) “I have complete confidence in the employees and technology that carry the Sensus name. We are committed to providing safe products through engineering excellence and testing to industry standards.”

Despite the firm’s efforts to distance itself from the fires and point out that they are an industry-wide problem, Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall said officials would be going after the manufacturer to recoup at least some of the costs. “We’re going to be pursuing redress from the company in whatever way we can,” Wall said. “We can start with negotiations and, if that doesn’t work, we’ll take the next step.” No matter what happens, taxpayers will almost certainly end up footing some of the cost at the very least — probably most of it.

Canadian taxpayers and energy consumers, though, are hardly alone in their fiery problems with smart meters. In Oregon, for example, Portland General Electric (PGE) announced in late July that it would be replacing some 70,000 of the devices. The reason: At least three have caught fire so far. “This is our decision based on our assessment and our tests,” said Bill Nicholson, PGE senior vice president of customer service, emphasizing that the manufacturer had not recalled them. “We believe this risk is small, but it’s totally unacceptable to us.”

Before the more recent fiascos in Canada and Oregon, dozens of smart-meter fires in and around Pennsylvania also resulted in the devices being replaced. At least two of those blazes ended up setting the houses on fire, too, though, fortunately, nobody was injured in the resulting infernos. Consumers and taxpayers, of course, ended up footing the giant bill to replace the meters, despite a \$200 million federal “grant” to “encourage” utilities to impose the meters on unwitting or even hostile consumers.

But it is not just fires and explosions that are causing concern. In Quebec, for instance, news reports this week following an investigation by the state-funded CBC suggest that the controversial smart meters have been gouging customers — in some cases charging consumers double or even triple what they were paying before the device was installed. In Ontario, some 8,000 people have already filed formal complaints about overbilling attributed to the new meters.

Beyond fires, explosions, and price gouging, critics of smart meters have a wide range of other concerns as well. At the top of the list are safety and privacy. Many experts have also linked the installation scheme to global efforts [aimed at coercively reducing people’s consumption levels](#) in pursuit of nebulous and deeply controversial United Nations goals such as “[sustainability](#).”

“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 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.”

Among the biggest health concerns (other than being burned alive) is the emission of pulsed radio-



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frequency (RF) radiation by the devices. More than a few critics of the meters, for example, say they have suffered adverse health effects when the devices were installed at their home. Experts say the “electromagnetic smog” released by the meters can cause a wide range of health problems, too — especially in the elderly, children, and among vulnerable populations with existing health issues.

Despite the complaints largely being dismissed by proponents of the new system and the crony special interests profiting from it, even the American Academy of Environmental Medicine has called for caution in rolling out smart meters while further studies and investigations are conducted on the potentially harmful effects. “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.”

Also deeply troubling to critics are the vast new surveillance opportunities available to authorities and criminals under the smart-grid regime. Among other problems, the meters offer unprecedented tools for hackers and governments to spy on citizens and run roughshod over the U.S. Constitution’s Fourth Amendment on a previously unimaginable scale. Most of the meters, for example, can supply detailed hour-by-hour data, in some cases even more detailed than that.

Even government bodies have acknowledged the threat. “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. “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, also sounded the alarm. “The Europe-wide rollout of ‘smart metering systems’ enables massive collection of personal information from European households, thus far unprecedented in the energy sector,” the EDPS said in a 2012 report, calling the new system “a radical change” compared to past information gathering. “The potential intrusiveness of collection is increased by the fact that data are collected, which may infer information about domestic activities: data may track what members of a household do within the privacy of their own homes.”

According to the report, smart meters will allow the collection of detailed data regarding energy consumption “down to the hour, quarter of an hour, and more.” The mass amount of detailed information, it said, means that anyone with access to the data will be able to “know when each individual appliance in a household is turned on and off, and can often also identify what specific appliances are used.” The system could be a potential goldmine for non-governmental criminals, too — letting them determine, for example, exactly when a house is unoccupied. “This raises concerns with regard to security, the rights to privacy and the protection of personal data,” the report said. “The risks to data protection, however, go further than these most immediate concerns.”

Even more alarming for privacy advocates, the report continues, is the fact that “deployment of smart metering may lead to tracking the everyday lives of people in their own homes and building detailed profiles of all individuals based on their domestic activities.” On top of that, the EDPS explained, smart meters can even collect data from RFID tags, the electronic chips that are becoming increasingly



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ubiquitous worldwide.

“Further, law enforcement agencies, tax authorities, insurance companies, landlords, employers, and other third parties may also be interested in personal energy usage information,” the EU report continued. In its concluding remarks, the EDPS noted that the mass adoption of the smart meters entails “considerable risks” and enables “massive collection of personal data from European households and may lead to tracking what members of a household do within the privacy of their own homes.”

Some Americans, horrified by the prospect of such intrusive surveillance, have reacted forcefully to the imposition of the “smart” technology. In Texas, for example, concerns over the meters reached a boiling point two years ago when a woman pulled a gun on the installation man for trespassing on her property after being warned to leave. “My main concern originally was the privacy — as far as I’m concerned this is a surveillance device,” Houston-area activist leader Thelma Taormina [told The New American after the incident](#).

Of course, the rollout of the smart meters in the United States, like countless other ongoing controversies, was funded in large part by billions of American taxpayers 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 in announcing the stimulus-funded “Smart Grid” plot. Apparently, that was not the case.

Authorities are urging people whose smart meters catch on fire to immediately exit the premises and call emergency services. Critics of the scheme, meanwhile, are urging all Americans — most of whom still do not have the potentially dangerous surveillance devices installed on their homes yet — to resist.

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