



Kriss Worthington

Councilmember, City of Berkeley, District 7
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CONSENT CALENDAR

June 29, 2010

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Councilmember Kriss Worthington
 Subject: Follow-up on Smart Meters: City Response to Smart Meter Problems and Preparation of a Letter to the California Public Utilities Commission.

RECOMMENDATION

Take action in responding to Smart Meter problems and send a letter to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), asking for continued investigation of the Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) Smart Meter program, requirement of PG&E to submit a characterization study of the system planned to the City of Berkeley, requirement of PG&E to allow consumers to 'opt out' of the program without repercussions, as well as an immediate moratorium on the disposal, recycling, or permanent alteration of old PG&E meters and a call for consideration of a moratorium on the further installation of PG&E Smart Meters.

BACKGROUND

Cities statewide have begun to question the validity of Pacific Gas & Electric's new Smart Meters. PG&E has been installing Smart Meters in Berkeley and many other Californian cities in recent months, and the corporation has come under attack for such reported problems that have come with these Smart Meters, ranging from overbillings and improper data transferrals to fire safety concerns. With such a startling number of new problems arising so quickly, cities like San Francisco, Sebastopol, Camp Meeker, Cotati, Bolinas, and Fairfax have all sent letters to the CPUC demanding and supporting moratoriums on Smart Meter installments in their city limits until Smart Meters can be safely installed without such unintended alleged consequences. Additionally, the entire county of Santa Cruz submitted a similar letter.

The city of Berkeley might well consider sending a similar letter. In order to assure Berkeley residents that any unintended consequences of Smart Meter installment will be avoided, such a letter is direly needed—and soon.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

CONTACT PERSON

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Attached:

1. Letter to President of CPUC.

Michael R. Peevey
President
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Mr. Peevey:

The City of Berkeley writes you today to communicate its displeasure and concern over the installations of Pacific Gas & Electric's Smart Meters. Smart Meters, as you're well aware, have sparked a host of concerns with consumers statewide, relating to the safety, efficacy, and necessity of these new meters.

Our constituents have approached the Berkeley City Council with questions, horror stories, and worries. A resident of Berkeley by the name of Ms. Hill asked PG&E to cease installation of a Smart Meter on her home and was informed that she could not only not opt out of installation, but that "residents had no recourse" when it came to the issue. Also noteworthy is the fact that Berkeley constituents have formed, in conjunction with residents of many other Alameda County cities, Alameda County Residents Concerned About Smart Meters, or ACRCASM. ACRCASM, like other Smart Meter-related groups statewide, has publicized their concerns, many of which echo with the City of Berkeley's aforementioned requests to the CPUC.

Many other Berkeley residents have reported overbilling and overcharging problems. Berkeley residents Ms. Jelinek and Ms. Smith separately submitted to the Council letters affirming that their PG&E bills have significantly increased since the installations of their Smart Meters, as have countless others. The Council has been alarmed as well by the number of consumer complaints streaming in when it comes to such other issues as economic impact, fire safety, security risks and privacy, meter accuracy, improper data transferrals, job losses, and PG&E's remote ability to control consumer usage.

Some such issues run deeply in Berkeley. Fire safety, for one, strikes a nerve to Berkeley residents. Berkeley is a city which has suffered from fire damage in the past—risking further potential for wildfire in the City borders on reckless. With wildfire potential a very real possibility, based on the cases reported in which Smart Meters have been known to malfunction in such a dangerous way as to cause fires, physical safety of Berkeley residents is called into question.

Accuracy of the meters also has been a topic of debate. The vice-president of PG&E, Helen Burt, admitted to the San Francisco Chronicle that 43,000 Smart Meters have had "at least" one type of problem or another. Staggering enough on its own, but the Chronicle also later, on June 21st 2010, published an editorial calling for the immediate cessation of Smart Meter installations until Californian consumer worry is alleviated, and until public satisfaction is gained and meters are deemed fully "accurate". Finally, concern of overbillings remain a priority for the City of Berkeley.

In light of the numerous issues voiced by so many Berkeley and California residents, we request on behalf of the City of Berkeley the following:

Continued Investigation:

That the CPUC continue its independent investigation of PG&E's Smart Meter program.

Characterization Study:

That the CPUC require PG&E to submit a characterization study of the system planned to the City of Berkeley.

'Opt Out' Option:

That the CPUC require PG&E to allow consumers to 'opt out' of the Smart Meter program, without the potential for repercussions to consumers.

Disposal of Meters:

That the CPUC place an immediate moratorium on the removal, disposal, or permanent alteration of old PG&E meters within the city limits of Berkeley.

Consideration of Installation Moratorium:

That the CPUC consider placing a moratorium on installation of PG&E Smart Meters.

Thank you for your time, attention, and consideration.

Sincerely,

