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The new generation of meters not benign

By LINDA MILLMAN

David Brooks' recent article highlighted PSNH's May announcement of a program to replace our wired analog meters with new digital wireless meters – devices that will enable meter readings to be done once a month from a motor vehicle via wireless radio frequency signals. This program includes every home, school and business within PSNH's service area, no matter which company supplies the electricity. If you receive a bill from PSNH, you'll be getting a new meter. Rollout is underway in Nashua.

In January, Itron Inc. announced its selection by PSNH to implement and install "about 550,000 advanced electricity meters." The spec sheet for Itron's residential CENTRON Model C1S describes its ability to be upgraded easily to permit metering functions common to "smart meters," such as demand, time-of-use and load profile. Utilities aren't calling them "smart meters"; they know electric consumers are becoming increasingly aware of serious risks "smart meters" pose to privacy, security, safety and health. Calling them by another name doesn't make them more safe or secure. Both transmit electromagnetic radio frequency radiation in spiked pulses every 30 seconds in a quarter-mile radius.

Risks of these "advanced meters" include:

n Privacy: More precise, detailed usage and activity data is collected, stored and accessible to third parties. The data is subject to abuse, and its use may violate our Fourth and Fifth Amendment rights against warrantless search/surveillance and self-incrimination.

n Security: Protection against penetration by hackers and cyber-terrorists is inadequate and puts critical electrical systems at risk.

n Safety: "Advanced meters" are not UL-certified. They're subject to overheating, power surges and arcing and are at risk for fire and explosion due to increased electrical interference with buildings' wiring. Electrical appliances, heating/air conditioning systems and other electrical devices are easily "fried."

n Inaccuracy: Many ratepayers report significant overbilling and higher overall bills not in line with prior usage.

n Not cost-effective: Energy efficiency doesn't result from meter installation.

n Potential adverse health effects: After installation, a growing number of individuals have experienced new debilitating symptoms, including chronic fatigue, sleep problems, nausea, memory problems, physical weakness, dizziness, ringing in the ears, joint pain, irregular heart rate, chest pain, high blood pressure, difficulty breathing, seizures and recurrence of cancer.

n Adverse environmental impact: Harm to wildlife habitat and reproduction is documented

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n Installation issues: Utilities don't make modifications to limit RF exposure where "advanced meters" are installed together in multi-unit settings. Upgrades to wiring or sockets won't be done. Installation is performed by unlicensed installers.

New Hampshire law requires property owners' signed consent before installing a "smart meter gateway device" that communicates with appliances and other electrical devices in the home. There's no New Hampshire state or federal law that requires our acceptance of "advanced meters" or "smart meters."

With this change, everyone will encounter new exposure to constant spiking pulsed wireless RF radiation. Children and those with chronic medical conditions are at especially high risk. Because it will be everywhere, there will be no way to avoid it. Unlike cellphones and other wireless devices in our homes, "advanced meters" can't be shut off.

Wireless RF radiation is already pervasive in our schools, stores, businesses, public buildings and urban areas and from nearby cell towers and antennas.

In January 2012, the American Academy of Environmental Medicine voiced strong opposition to installing wireless "smart meters" in homes and schools. They assessed current medical literature and raised "serious concerns" regarding the levels of RF radiation or extremely low frequency exposures given off by the meters.

AAEM called for "an immediate and complete moratorium on their use and deployment until further study can be performed." AAEM dismissed as obsolete and inadequate FCC safety guidelines – used by utilities to justify installing "smart meters" – that only look at thermal tissue damage (burns), whereas current literature shows significant effects on the human body from lower energy densities that accumulate over time. The literature raises credible questions about the significant effect on the genes, cells, hormones, male fertility, blood/brain barrier and increased risk of certain cancers from radiation levels similar to those from smart meters. The Academy also emphasized special risks to children's developing brains and capacity for learning.

"Continuing with their installation would be extremely irresponsible," it said of these meters.

I call on PSNH to halt its rollout immediately and keep the wired electro-mechanical analog meters in place until such time as it can deploy technology that is verifiably safe, secure and in the public's best interest.

"Advanced meters" wireless technology is not right for New Hampshire consumers.

Linda Millman is an attorney who lives in Nashua.

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