

THE TRUTH ABOUT SMART METER FIRES AND FAILURES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Energy Minister Bill Bennett and BC Hydro state that there have been no fires or dangerous incidents involving smart meters. Are they deceitful or just incompetent?

If they truly want us to believe that there have been no smart meter fires or failures then they should explain:

1. Why there are reports of smart meter fires and failures originating from such sources as the Fire Commissioner, BC Safety Authority and even the quite contrarian Hydro itself.
2. How they know that there haven't been fires or failures since no agency is able to track them.
3. What the reason is for Hydro removing smart meters after a fire before they can be examined by the Fire Inspector – which is against the law.
4. How they know there is no danger when there is little or no interagency communication regarding fires which is needed for information of those fires to reach the responsible officials and there is no penalty for failure to communicate.
5. How they know there is no danger when the evidence of the cause of the fire is destroyed by the fire since these plastic meters are composed entirely of combustible materials.
6. How they can expect us to accept as reliable reports attesting to the safety of smart meters when the authors get their data exclusively from agencies that are unable to track smart meter fire and failures.

How can we get evidence of fires if Minister Bennett and BC Hydro couldn't? Or wouldn't? Because we looked.

Beginning with media reports, information was requested from various agencies via Freedom of Information. Additional reports were requested that were based on information provided directly by victims. It can only be assumed that many more "events" have occurred because, as we have found, not all fires make it to the newspaper.

II. Reports of fire

A. BC Safety Authority accrued via FOI.

- 1) **Sparwood** Post Office , Aug. 2012 where the meter sparked and smoked, but no major fire resulted because there was an immediate response. <http://www.stopsmartmetersbc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/FOI-2014-65-Sharon-Noble-Acknowledgment-and-Final-Letter-1.pdf>

B. Hydro reports accrued via FOI. <http://www.stopsmartmetersbc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/FOI-Hydro-re-fires-2.pdf>

- 1) **Coquitlam** – “Smart meter installed July 2012. Preliminary investigation indicates excessive consumption load over-heated socket and created fire.” **(#16)**
- 2) **Abbotsford**, Dec. 2012 – “Abbotsford Fire Dept. reported an incident where a homeowner claimed his newly installed smart meter was smoking and proceeded to get his camera to take a picture of it. Supposedly, while taking the picture, the smart meter shot off the wall – this has not been verified, there is no photo, and there is no further information. Smart meter installed March 2012.” **(#24)**
Hydro did not investigate a meter blowing off the wall of a home. Does this allow them to say it didn’t happen?
- 3) **Langley**, Nov. 2011. “Broken socket jaw made contact with meter socket cover during meter exchange. Arcing led to fire at meter location, continued to burn through neutral conductor and onto coax. TV cable.” **(#4)** Installers were hired with no prior experience, given 10 days training. They did not follow standard protocol (e.g. exchanged meter under full load).

C. Fire Commissioner Reports accrued via FOI.

- 1) There were 38 FOI requests made to the Fire Commissioner. That office didn’t have reports on 16 of those fires and so more information was requested from other sources. Initial requests were made in March, 2014 for incidents dating back to early-mid 2012. 14 of those reports have yet to be received. Of the reports that the Fire commissioner did have, most were only partial, some included only the title page, and thus, necessitated further FOI requests. When more complete reports were received some of them indicated that there was no record of a fire or meter failure -- no record, despite the fact that in some of those specific events (according to media reports) the buildings burned to the ground. And in one case, a woman died in the fire. (see emails #2-5) [link](#)
- 2) The fire Commissioner’s office is an agency of the government - which would help to explain its reluctance to find fault with the government’s pet initiative. As a consequence, the reasons for meter failures and fires are not the meters themselves but
 - a) “socket failures”
 - b) “electrical arcing”
 - c) damage done at the time of installation
 - d) undetermined, as the damage is so severe that there was nothing left to inspect.

This last category represents the largest number of reports and it is no wonder since the meter is plastic and, therefore, combustible. With the meters destroyed in the fire, the only items that survive and, thus, to blame are the electrical components in the buildings. But if these meters were safe and installed according to the electrical code it is unlikely that there would have been any fires at all. (sample Fire Commissioner reports at [_____](#)) [link](#)

This is precisely why the Fire Commissioner's office doesn't have a code for smart meter fires. Until the arrival of smart meters, meter fires were practically nonexistent.

D. Media reports via the links below.

<http://www.stopsmartmetersbc.com/fires/unusual-number-of-fires-smart-meters-linked/>

<http://www.stopsmartmetersbc.com/fires/smart-meter-fires/>

These are the fires that Mr. Bennett and BC Hydro say didn't happen: fires that have occurred in every community; fires in which entire homes have burned to the ground.

Then how can Bill Bennett and Hydro think they can get away with saying there aren't? Because they believe there is no way for us to find out the truth. And they do have a point. Just witness the byzantine administrative detail we have had to navigate in order to uncover even a smidgen of the facts.

And the dissembling didn't just start with Bennett. NDP Kathy Corrigan quoted a 2009 report charging that there was no tracking, no accountability for failure to follow procedure, no central body looking at the fire hazards that were being put on our homes. That was in 2012. Well, here it is 2014 and, if anything, it's gotten worse.

II. TRACKING OF SMART METER FIRES OR FAILURES

How do Mr. Bennett and BC Hydro know that no fires have occurred when no agency is responsible for tracking them?

1. The Fire Commissioner has no code for smart meters. All are coded as "electrical".(email #1)
2. The Fire Commissioner does not get reports on all fires. (emails 2-6)
3. The Fire Commissioner believes BC Safety Authority is tracking smart meters so they don't have to. (email #1)
4. BC Safety Authority can only investigate incidents that have been reported to it, and not all have been. (email #9)
5. BC Safety Authority does not report incidents to the Fire Commissioner because it believes, erroneously, that the Fire Commissioner gets them, too. (email #8 - 10)
6. BC Safety Authority has no jurisdiction over smart meters so does not report fires or failures to anyone. BC SA assumes BC Utilities Commission is getting reports. (email #11)
7. BC Utilities Commission is not getting reports. (Email#12)

III. Unreliable sources

Bill Bennett has referred to a commissioned report, written by former head of the Fire Chiefs Association Len Garis, as proof that the meters do not pose a fire risk. Mr. Garis was paid \$15,000 by BC Hydro, and reported that, based on the Fire Commissioner's data, there had been no smart meter fires.

It is instructive that the only official report attesting to the safety of smart meters was written by a consultant at the behest of BC Hydro, paid to do so by BC Hydro, and who acquired his data exclusively from an agency that is unable to track smart meter fires and failures.

IV. Violations of procedure

A. NOT ALL FIRES REPORTED:

Not only are there no codes for fires, but not all fires are being reported to the Fire Commissioner, in violation of Section 9 of the Fire Services Act .

http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96144_01

Only fires causing "substantial" damage are being reported. Fires that have resulted in little damage, or events that, if left unattended, would have resulted in a major fire, are not being reported. (email #4) One example is the fire at the Sparwood Post Office (<http://www.stopsmartmetersbc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/FOI-2014-65-Sharon-Noble-Acknowledgment-and-Final-Letter-1.pdf>) Other examples are in emails # 5&6/

Documentation required by the Act often is missing many months after the event. When asked why this is lacking, the response was:

"Local authorities are required to file a report on all fires with the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) however in the event that they fail to do so, there is no information available to the OFC to release in response to a request. In such situations, the local authority would be the only source of the information being sought." (Email #2)

B. NOT ALL INCIDENTS REPORTED:

The Fire Commissioner advised that the Canadian Safety Authority would be tracking smart meter fires and failures, but all references apply to the BC Safety Authority. When asked about tracking of smart meter incidents, BCSA's initial response was one of dismissal, that there had been no smart meters directly linked to fires. (email #7) . There is no tracking of smart meter fires or failures.

The BC Safety Standards Act Sec. 36

(http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/document/ID/freeside/00_03039_01#section36)

requires persons in charge to report an "incident" as soon as reasonably possible. Yet incidents of melting, overheating, or causing "minor" fires are not being reported on a consistent basis. (email #9)

A prime example occurred in Jan. 2013 in Prince George where a smart meter on a pole outside a summer residence was seen to catch fire. The pole was burned and Hydro was called. The meter was taken, and the resident was sent a bill for the pole. Photos were taken by a witness, reports were requested of Hydro, the Fire Commissioner and BCSA. None was available.(email 8 & 8a)) It's as if it didn't happen.

C. NO SHARING OF INFORMATION:

When the BC Safety Authority does receive reports about a failed smart meter, no information is shared with the Fire Commissioner because BCSA assumes the Fire Commissioner gets its own report on the incidents. (Emails 8-10)

Neither is BCSA able to take any action because even though it has limited authority regarding BC Hydro in some regards, it has absolutely no authority to take action with regard to smart meters. They have been told only BCUC has jurisdiction. (email #11)

D. PRECLUDED FROM TAKING ACTION

The BCUC confirmed that it does not get reports on fires or failures associated with smart meters. (email #12) and even if they did, under the Clean Energy Act and Directive 4, the BCUC likely would be precluded from taking action.

E. VIOLATES REGULATIONS

1. According to the Safety Standards Act, Sec. 36, nothing must be taken from the scene of the fire until the fire inspector has given his approval. BC Hydro has removed smart meters before the inspector has been able to do his job, and without approval. (<http://www.stopsmartmetersbc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/FOI-2014-65-Sharon-Noble-Acknowledgment-and-Final-Letter-1.pdf>)

2. Hydro does not provide reports to BCSA on failures, such as melted or overheated meters, or small fires in which smart meters were involved. This is required under the Safety Standards Act, General Regulations.

http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/document/ID/freeside/18_105_2004#section34

F. BC HYDRO SHIFTS DAMAGE COST TO HOMEOWNERS

BC Hydro is the agency with most access to information about fires but it has denied any problems have occurred, putting the onus of responsibility on the homeowners. The policy has been consistent: blame the homeowner's base or home wiring. In many instances homeowners or their insurance have had to pay for damage done by incompetent installation or faulty meters.

G. DECEPTIVE INFORMATION:

Despite denials to the contrary, when an FOI was submitted to BC Hydro, asking for information related to any fire or other significant incident relating to smart meters either during installation or after, a report with 26 events occurring from Aug. 2011 to Nov. 2013 was provided. It is at <http://www.stopsmartmetersbc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/FOI-Hydro-re-fires-2.pdf>.

H. INCOMPLETE RESPONSE TO FOI:

Though Hydro declared that the FOI it sent was complete. (email #13), many of the incidents which had been reported to either the BCSA or BC Fire Commissioner, or in newspapers were not included.

Examples:

Port Alberni fire, Fire Commission report JAG-2014-00688 <http://www.stopsmartmetersbc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Fire-Comm-Fire-Port-Alberni-2014-04-14.pdf>

Nanaimo meter failure, Nov. 24. 2011

https://www.google.ca/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=-JviU_LalsGV8Qej24DoDw&gws_rd=ssl#q=http:%2F%2Fwww.nanaimodailynews.com%2Fnews%2Ffamily-loses-electricity-for-day-after-meter-installed-1.242766%09%09%09%09%09

Cloverdale, meter melted, Oct. 2012

<http://www.cloverdalereporter.com/news/176510271.html?c=y&curSection=/&curTitle=BC+News&bc09=tr ue>

CONCLUSION:

So, to the question as to whether Energy Minister Bill Bennett and BC Hydro, the man and the agency, are deceitful or just incompetent when they state that there have been no fires or failures involving ITRON smart meters installed in British Columbia, the facts would appear to speak for themselves.

They knew, or should have known, about the fire risk as early as 2011. Yet they did nothing. Rather they dissembled, denied, and obfuscated. Their negligence has allowed more fires to occur, endangering both lives and property.

The people of British Columbia demand that these dangerous devices be removed from our homes immediately and replaced with analogs. Those who are guilty of malfeasance will be held responsible, morally and legally.

