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New Hampshire Electric Co-op Implements New Technology

By Fred Anderson
President and CEO, NHEC

Recent letters to various newspapers have raised questions about the safety and intent of so-called Smart Grid technology. I feel it's important to address these questions as they relate to New Hampshire Electric Co-op's (NHEC) ongoing effort to install smart meters in its service territory.

Between now and the end of 2012, every Co-op member will be receiving a new meter that contains a small, 1/4-watt radio transmitter. Instead of a meter reader visiting your property once a month to record your electric usage, your new meter will be reporting its readings several times a day via a wireless communications network.

A letter writer indicates that these emissions are harmful to human health. However, there is no evidence to support this claim. Co-op members should know that their new meters are reporting readings seven to 10 times per day. Each transmission is approximately 1.5 seconds in duration, meaning your meter will be transmitting a total of 15 seconds per day. The strength of the radio signal is very low. In fact, emissions from a smart meter are only about one thousandth the strength of a typical cell phone.

There is no shortage of information online about smart meters. Unfortunately, much of it is misleading, and some of it is just plain wrong. While some stoke fears of a government conspiracy, others seek to profit from people's fears to sell supposed remedies. The fact is, no reputable, non-partisan study of the technology (and there have been many) have found any harmful effects of smart meter technology. Just this year, the California Council on Science and Technology released a study that found

radio-frequency emissions from smart meters are "well below the threshold" for harmful effects as established by the Federal Communications Commission. Additionally, the study found, "There is no evidence that additional standards are needed to protect the public from smart meters."

A letter writer also states that smart meters are monitoring consumers, appliances, and electric usage in order to force a change in consumer behavior. For starters, the new meters being installed in Co-op service territory do no more than what your old meter had been doing — recording the amount of electricity you use. This is the job of an electric meter. It is the only way the electric company can bill you for the power you use.

As for the implication that smart meters somehow allow the electric utility to spy on you or otherwise monitor your behavior, this is absolutely false. The information coming from your smart meter consists of voltage and wattage used. No more, no less. It does not (and cannot), for instance, tell when you're using your vacuum cleaner or your electric tooth brush. There is no physical way for the Co-op to remotely adjust your electric usage or your appliances.

The real intent of NHEC's smart meter conversion is to offer members a much more detailed look at their electric consumption. What you do with that information is entirely up to you. If you take steps to conserve energy, that's great. If not, you should know that NHEC's smart meter project will not impose on your health or habits in any way.

I encourage you to learn more about the smart meter conversion and how it can empower you to save energy and money at NHEC.coop/AMI.

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