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PG&E announces moratorium on Smart Meter program in Fairfax

Surprise announcement comes in light of town's proposed ordinance banning the wireless meters

By **Kelly Dunleavy** August 4, 2010

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PG&E representatives

(<http://www.pge.com/smartmeter/>) made a surprise announcement at the Fairfax Town Council meeting Wednesday night that they would be voluntarily suspending the installation of the wireless meters. The moratorium will be solely within town limits and just until public meetings can be held on the topic.

"Until we help educate your public," said PG&E representative Josh Townsend.

Although an ordinance to prohibit the Smart Meters for one year was on the agenda, [Mayor Lew Tremaine \(/local_facts/fairfax-mayor-lew-tremaine\)](#) suggested that in light of the PG&E announcement the council consider making the ordinance a temporary six-month ban.

"It would give PG&E the opportunity to be good to their word," said Tremaine, who also cautioned the council and the public present to "proceed carefully."

Although Tremaine argued that the ordinance could always be extended if at the end of six months PG&E had failed to make good on their word, his proposal was met with loud boo's from the crowd.

"I think minimum we should have a 10 year moratorium where we can have studies done and see if people have been effected," said Diane Hoffman.

Residents also were worried that PG&E wouldn't really listen to their concerns or consider a long-term moratorium on the meters, but would simply attempt to "educate" the town.

"I think that's a poor bargain," said one resident.

After raucous public comment, the council ultimately voted to approve the original ordinance banning for one year "the installation of Smart Meters and related equipment within the Town of Fairfax or in, along, upon, under, and over the public streets."

"This is not a democratically deployed system. It's a system that's being forced upon us," said [Councilman Larry Bragman \(/local_facts/fairfax-vice-mayor-larry-bragman\)](#) to standing applause. "This is what we were voted into office to do."

In July, the Fairfax Town Council voted to pull out all its guns to stop PG&E from bringing its Smart Meter program into town. ([/articles/fairfax-doesnt-want-to-get-smart](#)) Though it appeared the other efforts the town had made to stop the wireless Smart Meters had been met with few results, the PG&E representatives said they would be suspending the installation of the meters in Fairfax until public meetings and forums could be held.

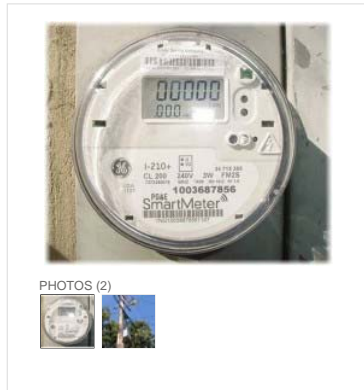
"We hear the questions and we want to try and help facilitate the answers," said Townsend.

The wireless meters would use a combination of wireless cellular and radio networks to transmit individual usage data back to PG&E. [Read about how the meters work here. \(/articles/how-smart-meters-work\)](#)

Residents have raised concerns in the past few months about privacy and security problems with the data being transmitted wirelessly, inaccurate readings from the meters, and health problems from electro-magnetic frequencies.

[Read the basic facts and history of the Smart Meter program here. \(/articles/the-ins-and-outs-of-pges-smart-meter-program\)](#)

Although PG&E has consistently maintained that it would not delay the installation of the meters despite rising concerns, the fact that Fairfax had pursued a number of legal options and was considering the prohibition ordinance spurred the utility to meet with Tremaine earlier Wednesday morning.



PHOTOS (2)



PHOTOS



Tremaine told the public that he suggested to PG&E that they hold two public forums, "the first in which the community does the talking," he said.

Townsend said that PG&E would work with town staff to set up public meetings and forums and that no more meters would be installed until those meetings were held. He was not able to give any sort of a timeframe, however, that the deployment would last.

So far 220 wireless Smart Meters have been installed in town and four transponder access points have also been put on telephone poles. Eight-thousand meters (electric and gas) are planned for Fairfax eventually.

Bragman encouraged PG&E to "de-power" the four transponders during this moratorium period. PG&E said it would certainly consider that.

"This is a welcomed and significant shift in the debate," said Tremaine.

San Anselmo also heard a presentation by PG&E last week on Smart Meters, but decided to hold off on any action until the California Public Utility Commission considered an independent audit expected in the next few weeks. (</articles/san-anselmo-considers-the-benefits-of-smart-meters>)

"This will not be like it was in San Anselmo. We are not interested in a dog and pony show," said Tremaine, who encouraged residents to also be open to PG&E. "A dialogue goes both ways."

Tremaine said he was surprised with the respect he got from PG&E representatives at his meeting with them and appreciated the speed with which they got corporate approval for a voluntary moratorium on their part.

"A long overdue conversation about this program will start here and it will not stop here," said Tremaine.

Do you think PG&E will make good on their promise? What do you think of the Smart Meter program? Tell us in the comments.

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