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SmartMeter foes call study on cell phones vindication

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For opponents of Pacific Gas and Electric Co.'s SmartMeters, the World Health Organization's recent reclassification of cell phone radiation as "possibly carcinogenic" is big news.

Many of them consider wireless devices to be a health risk, capable of causing cancer. They also blame SmartMeters for triggering nausea, migraines, sleeplessness and depression among people who suffer from "electrosensitivity," a condition whose very existence remains the subject of angry debate.

SmartMeter critics want PG&E to stop installing the devices until the possible health effects can be thoroughly studied and understood. They haven't been able to convince the California Public Utilities Commission, which oversees PG&E. But they seized on Tuesday's WHO news as vindication.

"Now that the WHO has come out and publicly confirmed that there are significant risks from wireless technology, will the utilities and regulators admit they have made a terrible mistake in deciding to roll out wireless mesh networks that are blanketing our communities with a likely carcinogen?" said Joshua Hart, with the group Stop Smart Meters.

"We need to put the brakes on any further meter installation and immediately deactivate the existing networks. That is the only sensible and humane response to what has now become a growing public health emergency."

The WHO reclassification also comes three months after a study by the U.S. National Institutes of Health found that a 50-minute cell-phone call increases activity in the area of the brain closest to the antenna.

PG&E maintains the SmartMeters, and the radio-frequency radiation they emit, are safe. The WHO reclassification hasn't changed officials' minds, at least not yet.

"At this point, all I can tell you is that we are aware of the study, and we're looking into it," said PG&E spokesman Jeff Smith on Tuesday.



While the reclassification will add fuel to the SmartMeter controversy, it won't settle it. The WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer did not, in fact, confirm that wireless technology poses significant risks.

Rather, the agency based its reclassification on a study that found an increased risk of a specific type of brain cancer - glioma - among people who use cell phones at least 30 minutes a day. The agency considered the evidence that cell phones can cause glioma "limited" - credible, but not iron-clad. The agency found "inadequate" evidence that wireless tech could cause other forms of cancer. And the agency's press release doesn't even mention electrosensitivity.

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