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Report finds no health threat from PG&E SmartMeter

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A long-awaited report released Tuesday on the possible dangers of Pacific Gas and Electric Co. SmartMeters found that radiation from the wireless devices does not threaten public health - at least not in any way proven by science.



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The intensity of the meters' radiation falls well within federal limits for wireless devices, according to the report from the California Council on Science and Technology. And those limits are more than adequate to prevent the electromagnetic waves from heating human tissue, which the report calls the only proven health threat from waves of that frequency.

But the report, requested last year by two California assemblymen, left open the possibility that other negative health effects from wireless devices may exist. That idea remains the subject of fierce international debate.

As such, the report is unlikely to end the controversy surrounding PG&E's SmartMeters, which critics blame for triggering headaches and nausea in people who consider themselves sensitive to electromagnetic radiation.

Two women concerned about the devices' possible health effects were arrested Tuesday morning trying to block SmartMeter deployment trucks in Rohnert Park.

Both the company and its critics on Tuesday found support for some of their arguments in the council's report.

'Fact-based report'

"We're hopeful that today's fact-based report helps alleviate some concern that some customers have raised about radiofrequency and SmartMeters," said PG&E spokesman Paul Moreno.

"This report concludes that they cannot dismiss health impacts from the radiation in SmartMeters," said Sandi Maurer, founder of the EMF Safety Network.

"In some ways, I'm sort of right back where I was at the beginning, which is the debate over this issue is not going to be resolved any time soon," said Assemblyman Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, who requested the report.

The report, however, does bolster a bill that Huffman introduced in December. His bill would force PG&E and the state's other utilities to offer customers a choice between receiving a wireless SmartMeter or an advanced meter that would transmit the same data through a wired connection. The council's report explicitly supports offering that alternative.

The council is a nonprofit organization that advises the California government on scientific questions.

For the report, the council did not conduct its own primary research. Instead, the council surveyed more than a hundred current studies on the health effects of radiation and looked at technical data about SmartMeters.

The meters, according to the council, emit radiofrequency radiation "that is a very small fraction of the exposure level established as safe by the FCC guidelines."

The Federal Communications Commission guidelines only cover the ability of radiofrequency radiation to heat human tissue.

"No clear evidence" shows other kinds of health effects from such radiation, but the report says further research is needed into the topic.

'No smoking gun'

"There's no smoking gun out there saying there's a nonthermal effect - we haven't found it," said Susan Hackwood, the council's executive director, in an interview. "There's a credible body of researchers out there studying this, and that's good."

Last week, a study from electromagnetic health researcher Cindy Sage argued that SmartMeters can violate FCC exposure limits in some circumstances, depending on their location on a home. Sage on Tuesday blasted the council's report.

"The conclusions are indistinguishable from the industry mantra that says proof beyond any doubt is required about wireless health risks before taking precautions," she said.

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