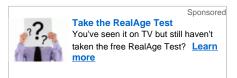
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Sebastopol residents lash out against PG&E plan for 'smart meters'

By RANDI ROSSMANN

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Wednesday, February 3, 2010 at 10:13 a.m. Last Modified: Wednesday, February 3, 2010 at 10:36 a.m.

PG&E's plan to install wireless meters on area homes has some Sebastopol residents calling for city leaders to reject the plan because they fear the meters could impact their health.



A gas meter on a southwest Santa

Rosa residence outfitted with a PG&E SmartMeter transponder. The

transponder has not yet been activated.

Called SmartMeter, the plan calls for the utility company to bring automated meters to Sonoma County sustomers, with plans to begin placing them on residences this month in Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park and Petaluma.

But dozens of Sebastopol residents complained to city councilmembers this week claiming that radiation rom the meters' electromagnetic fields could cause a range of negative health issues, including cancer.

"I want the city of Sebastopol to be the first city to say 'hell no," to the utility meter program, said Madison Baker of Sebastopol.

PG&E officials, who have also been underfire for increases in energy bills after the meters are installed, eject the notion that the meters are unsafe.

'We don't believe there are health hazards associated with the Smart meters," said Katie Romans, PG&E spokeswoman who attended Tuesday's hearing. "But we do want to address the community's concerns fully. We'll be taking those concerns back to our experts," she said with a plan to return to Sebastopol to further address the issue.

Andrew Tang, also of PG&E, said studies conducted in 2005 and 2008 show the rates of radiation from the electromagnetic fields fall within standards and levels set by the FCC and the new meters will be a benefit to both the utility and its customers.

PG&E says the new wireless grid promises to pinpoint power failures faster, would eliminate meter readers on private property and give consumers access to data in near real time.

Related Links:

- Sebastopol council weighs action on wireless PG&E meters

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- PG&E predicts more shutoffs with new meters
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