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

By <u>RANDI ROSSMANN</u> THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

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

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With the new meters, customers will be able to go online and see how much energy they're using, giving them options on how to save money.

"Who is this good for?" asked Elizabeth Fuller, a Sebastopol resident not satisfied by the explanations offered by PG&E.

"Will I send tweets to my refrigerator?" She scoffed at the notion of savings, wondering if the suggested benefits would appear as a suggestion to cook dinner at 3 a.m.

Sebastopol resident Nancy Hubert said the issue "is a matter of choice. ... I think this is pretty outrageous actually."

The meters have already been installed of some areas of California and have generated a class action lawsuit in Bakersfield over higher-thanexpected bills.

PG&E staff said any concerns should be directed to the company but also to the California Public Utilities Commission, which oversees the utility company's actions and has jurisdiction on the issue.

Mayor Sarah Gurney said options for the council at its Feb. 16 meeting include scheduling a town hall meeting, getting state legislators involved and possibly a lobbying effort to the utilities commission should the council see the need for future action.

Concerns in Sebastopol over electromagnetic fields are not new.

An effort to get free wireless Internet service in the city in 2008 first was approved, then failed when the council rescinded its approval after hearing from many critics of Wi-Fi. The critics believed the radiation emitted by wireless equipment, cell phones and similar devices could cause adverse health effects.

That decision brought international attention to the town and when local high school students took up the issue in favor of the service, the council said it would bring the issue back for reconsideration.

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