

Wireless Smart Meters and Civil Rights

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Global Research, March 06, 2013

Reader Supported News

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

What do you call it when the police come onto your property over your objection, without a warrant, and then arrest you for blocking the installation of a surveillance device? You call it smart meter installation in Naperville, Illinois, one of the few places where there's still resistance to the unproven devices.

Naperville, with a city-owned electric utility, has almost finished installing all its smart meters. In March it plans to "conduct a [1][public proceeding](#)[1] in order to consider proposed Federal energy standards and decide whether it will implement these proposed standards or decline to do so," as required by federal law.

Naperville, where the police arrested a woman for filming public officials carrying out their public duties, all the while being filmed by a TV camera crew, may be an unusual place, but the issues raised by smart meters are national and global. The woman, arrested on a public sidewalk, was charged with [2]["attempted eavesdropping."](#)[2]

With almost 50 million residential [3][wireless smart meters](#)[3] installed in the United States by the end of 2012, smart meters have largely disappeared from news media at all levels, even though their usefulness and safety are no more assured now than when they were first proposed years ago.

Even Backers Offer No Guarantees for Smart Meters

The projected usefulness of wireless smart meters won't be measurable until they have been more widely installed and in use for some time. The most likely use will be a utility's ability to raise electric rates by charging more when usage is highest.

Utilities might justify this by the cost of installing and operating wireless meter networks, although the installation has been heavily subsidized and utilities made the choice to use wireless meters even though a wired meter network is more stable and less expensive to operate.

The human health effects of wireless smart meters have yet to be demonstrated, since their impact is cumulative over time. Basically the utilities are running a massive health experiment and most of the population will be the guinea pigs.

The security of wireless smart meters from hackers, government surveillance, marketing data collectors, or anyone else has yet to be demonstrated. There is generally no protection, for example, preventing utilities from monitoring behavior and selling the data.

Despite these uncertainties, the relentless coercion exercised by governments and

government-regulated utilities across the country has successfully overwhelmed resistance in all but a few places.

City Arrests Single Moms for Opposing Smart Meters

In Naperville, the city not only proceeded with its smart meter installation before holding public proceedings required by law, the city also went forward in the face of a [4][pending federal lawsuit](#)[4] that sought an injunction against their doing exactly what they did.

In other words, the events of January 24 did not come out of nowhere, but could be seen as a deliberate attempt by the city to install smart meters on people before the court could stop them. Of the numerous [5][videos documenting Naperville](#)[5] activities, including outspoken criticism of the city's actions. One video, that has [6][over 72,000 views](#),[6] shows utility workers stepping over a locked private gate onto private property, without permission but with police protection.

Besides its pending federal lawsuit and belated public proceeding, Naperville also has local elections coming up in April. Although [7][the Chicago Tribune](#)[7] has provided consistent coverage of Naperville's determination to impose smart meters on every electricity customer without exception, the story has had little coverage elsewhere.

More typically, the first line of coercion by government and utilities is a fundamental blackmail tactic: governments allow utilities to charge electricity consumers an extra fee for NOT having a wireless smart meter installed at their residence. In exchange, the governments and utilities produce no warranty of safety, efficacy, or security.

Vermont May Be Alone in Protecting Citizens

Vermont is apparently the only state to have legislated this blackmail tactic out of legal existence. Vermont customers not only have the right to opt out of smart meter installation at no cost, Vermont customers can also change their minds and have utilities remove smart meters at no cost to customers.

In contrast, [8][Texas is currently considering](#)[8] allowing customers to opt out, but only for a fee. This is similar to laws that already exist in Arizona, Nevada, California, Oregon, and Wisconsin. As elsewhere, smart meter opposition in Texas has been spotty. A group calling itself [9]["Texans United Against Smart Meters"](#)[9] is holding a public hearing and demonstration in Austin on March 4, which they characterize as "a do or die point in our fight against Smart Meters."

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