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COMMUNITY ISSUE

How Smart Are Smart Meters?

By Jonathan Mirin

Are you an Eversource customer? National Grid? Have you been notified about the planned “upgrade” to a “smart meter”? “Smart” sounds good, doesn’t it? Kind of like your “smart” phone, which, for most people has become a huge convenience and integrated into our daily lives.

Eversource is leading the charge in Western MA with their rollout starting in August. They have been offering webinars where customers can learn:

- What will happen leading up to and during a smart meter installation.
- The features you’ll see once your smart meter is installed.
- The numerous benefits a smart meter offers.

Plus, smart meters are “free”! So what’s the concern? If you look at the history of rollouts across the US, you see significant fire, privacy, dirty electricity and cyber-security issues in addition to thousands of injury reports. Some of these injuries have been mild and some debilitating. Many of the injured did not know that smart meters were being installed on their property or apartment building. They just woke up sick and later understood that smart meters were installed the day prior. Smart meters employ microwave radiation to send and receive data between your home and the utility in real time which allows for features like “time of use billing”.

How could a technology which has the potential to cause Electromagnetic Radiation Syndrome and/or increase cancer and neurological disease rates be deployed so widely? Well, that’s a great question with a complex answer. In Massachusetts, when people were testifying and submitting research about microwave radiation harm to the Department of Public Utilities in 2014, the DPU used taxpayer money to bring in tobacco scientist Peter Valberg to testify smart meters are safe. This testimony became the justification for ignoring evidence of harm and ordering the smart meter rollout.

Currently, Eversource and National Grid offer opt outs for \$34/month and \$26/month. This would be appealing if you happen to not live or work in a building with multiple meters. However, even if you pay up, deployment also entails new antennas on most if not all telephone poles, i.e., more involuntary exposure. So, if you work from home, can pay the opt out fee and for a dirty electricity filter and your house is set back from the street you can stop reading now. If one of those is not true for you, you may want to learn more. One place to start is the free documentary “Take Back Your Power” which, although more than a decade old, gives a good overview. We have collected more links at hilltownhealth.org/smartmeter

Additional remedies include: · shielding inside your home behind the meter · installing a dirty electricity filter · contacting your elected representatives to pass S.2306, the long awaited no fee opt out bill · demanding that Chattanooga, TN be used as a model where all smart grid advantages are currently being enjoyed through their fiber-optic network while maximizing energy efficiency (ironically, wireless is an energy intensive technology) · demanding the utilities compete on safety to reduce the harm of wireless exposure by adjusting their equipment to minimize power and frequency of emissions while saving energy and stop using the 20+ year old FCC exposure limits as a Trojan Horse.

Jonathan Mirin is a co-director of Hilltown Health, a local group dedicated to leveraging safe technology for community well-being as well as co-Artistic Director of Piti Theatre Company.