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Foes of wireless meters seek choice

Imposing smart meters wrong, crowd told at public forum

Daily News Staff Reporter

People should have a right to choose whether to accept a health risk, a principal somehow forgotten in the rush to install wireless meters, an audience was told at a public meeting Monday night.

"Smart meters are part of a wider process occurring at every level of government, where your right to make a decision about what happens to your body is being taken away," said Shawn Buckley, a Kamloops constitutional lawyer who often deals with consumer rights.

About 150 people attended the gathering, the first public meeting held on the controversial issue, to hear arguments against the devices. No one at the meeting spoke in support of the technology.

Smart meters record consumption and communicate the information to utilities through use of two-way wireless radio transmission. The City is using the technology for its water-metering program as B.C. Hydro has them installed for electrical use. Fortis is also planning to install smart meters for gas consumption.

Buckley drew a contrast between the involuntary imposition of wireless technology and the overzealous application of the law prohibiting raw milk. The rejection of water meters in Kamloops by referendum, only to have them imposed by law, is another example of what he calls "the democratic deficit."

"What does it say about the state of freedom in Canada when educated adults cannot choose to drink raw milk? It's also our right to avoid health risks."

Science linking electromagnetic transmission, such as that from cellphones and WiFi, is generally considered to be inconclusive. However there is serious concern about low-level exposure over long periods, enough that the World Health Organization ranks it as warranting further study.

"I really think there is enough information out there that reasonable, educated adults would opt out," Buckley said.



Keith Anderson

Catherine and Dave Howcroft, left, and Colin Lyons were three of about 150 people who attended Monday's forum on smart meters at Desert Gardens.

With water meters, there is an option to have the meter located elsewhere on a property at a homeowner's expense. There is no option with electrical smart meters.

Brian Thiesen, who started a local chapter of the B.C. Coalition Against Water Meters, said there is a broader corporate agenda at work, a convergence of energy management to maximize profits. Public utilities such as B.C. Hydro are being pushed into debt to make them vulnerable to takeover, he said.

"The big money maker is that they're going to sell all of this data," Thiesen said.

He doesn't believe B.C. Hydro or the provincial government when they claim they have no plans to introduce time-of-use billing. Power bills ballooned in Ontario when it adopted the system.

Thiesen refuted Hydro claims that the system is secure from interference by hackers. The Pentagon and NATO have been hacked. Why not smart meters, he asked.

He also pointed out that wire meters cost \$50, last up to 50 years and are manufactured in Canada while wireless meters cost \$150, last only 10 years and are made in Asia.

"Passion trumps reason, passion for profits," he added. "We're trying to be the voice of reason."

Curtis Bennett, an electrical expert from Kelowna, said the applicable safety regulation, Health Canada's Safety Code Six, is clear but doesn't identify the link between electromagnetic radiation and health effects. That link is clear to him since the human body carries its own electrical current.

"The cause is electromagnetic induction; that's how we make electricity. This is causing electrical failure in our bodies, these frequencies."

A "complete lack of information" and the involuntary installations had Colin Lyons concerned enough to attend. He wished the public had been consulted beforehand.

"We just threw the HST back at them," he said.

Two contenders for City council seats also attended. Arjun Singh said he was gathering information and is not prepared to decide whether he's for or against. Tina Lange said she was hoping to see more scientific data at the meeting. She wasn't at the recent UBCM meeting where 55 per cent voted for a moratorium on smart meters.

"I really have my reservations about it as well," she said. "I think we need to have a bigger look."



Keith Anderson

Brian Thiesen speaks at the meeting.