

## ARE SMART ELECTRICITY METRES A SMART IDEA?

November 22, 2004

The Ontario provincial government proposes getting municipal power companies across the province to use smart electricity metres for tracking electricity use. The smart metres will track electricity consumption in residences each hour, 24 hours a day, and consumers will be charged to reflect the price for electricity used each hour.

I suppose, in theory, smart metres will encourage consumers to use electricity late at night or on weekends to save money because electricity usually costs more at peak periods of demand during the day or early evening hours than late at night or on weekends when there is less demand.

However, this will not necessarily conserve energy because people will still use the same amount of energy to do the chores they must do. They will simply do them at different times. For example, people might start their laundry at 10 pm to save money but they will use the same amount of energy as they would if they did their laundry between 6 and 8 pm when it costs more. In other words, we will simply redistribute energy consumption not necessarily use less or conserve energy.

In addition, most people work during the day and don't use as much electricity at home during the day as in the evenings. So, if everyone starts consuming more electricity late at night or on weekends to reduce their Hydro bill, they will actually use more electricity running lights longer at night while doing all the work that requires electrical appliances or use more electricity on weekends. This will increase demand during off hours. So, we will pay more.

Also, if we start using smart metres, local power companies will have to spend money installing the new metres, expanding computer networks, increasing staff to analyze more data, reprogramming computers for billing and using more energy. So, consumers will pay higher electricity rates to cover the increase in local power company expenses.

Furthermore, smart metres cost about \$450. So, the cost to pay this off will be added to our electricity bills. Alternatively, we could pay a fee to rent a metre. Once again, we will pay more.

So, it appears as though consumers might actually have to pay more to redistribute energy consumption in some sort of struggle to pay less. Is this smart?

Rather than forcing people to use smart metres, why doesn't the government set standards for the most energy efficient electric lights, machinery and appliances, force manufacturers to produce only those items, force retailers to sell only those items and force consumers to buy only those items? Why doesn't it pass laws to reduce the number of lights that businesses can use when closed, reduce the glitz and neon signs in cities, reduce the maximum allowable wattage for various lights, reduce the amount of power allowable per square foot in new homes, reduce the number of electric sockets allowable in new homes or find other ways, which force people to use less electricity?

More energy efficient items, rationing or a reduced ability to use electricity would reduce demand and save money at all times of the day and night until we can expand power production.

Garry Horsnell,  
Brantford, Ontario