

Meters and health impacts: no credible evidence

Another EMF study, another myth put to rest

Phil Carson | Jan 16, 2013



At this point in the interval meter saga, yet another diligent review of the facts lands with a thud.

The Public Utilities Commission of Texas delivered "Health and RF: EMF from Advanced Meters: An Overview of Recent Investigations and Analyses" last month and it should be useful to those of us in the reality-based community. The "thud" I mentioned reflects that, for others, facts have no relevance. No matter.

Let's review. The PUCT listened to its constituents, took their complaints about possible wireless meter impacts on human health seriously, as has California, Maine and other jurisdictions. The PUCT set out to distinguish fact from rumor and fear. It spent time and money to provide a definitive answer to the public. It cast a wide net, seeking a diverse range of legitimate sources.

The report's three main findings, in my view:

- A large body of scientific literature was reviewed
- It found no definite or proven biological effects from exposure to low-level RF
- It found no credible evidence that advanced meters emit harmful amounts of EMF

The report examined the science of radiation and recent studies. It looked at "other issues," from claims of electromagnetic hypersensitivity to electromagnetic fields, EMF as a weapon, etc.

The upshot is that the public and the power industry now have multiple literature reviews to consult. Other PUCs can decide whether to cite Texas, California, Maine et al, or spend the time, money and endure the distraction of further work on topic.

Let's acknowledge that the controversy isn't going away and that further insight is available in an upcoming Utilities Telecom Council (UTC) webcast on Feb. 21, 2pm EST.

None of this matters, of course, to hardcore believers who know they're being warped, baked, controlled; fanatics aren't open to scientific logic and evidence; and they've begun using surreptitious and disingenuous tactics. (See my recent column on the tactics now in use, in "Democratizing Energy? Keep the Loonies Away." And enjoy the juxtaposition of comments in the forum.)

The fundamental result is that these folks have self-marginalized. It may be worth noting that the true believer has a long history, with famous examples such as the Luddites. Add growing scientific complexities, economic

stress, anti-institutional mistrust (hey, I'm onboard with the latter) and you have covered at least some of this crowd.

Yet none of this really matters. We don't need to understand these folks' motivation. Opt-out policies now in place are the final answer from the world in which most of us inhabit: where gravity and the spherical nature of the earth is no longer in question. And the opt-out policy covers anyone for any reason.

It's worth studying the beauty and logic of the opt-out alternative, in that it renders moot all objections as being of equal merit. Something tells me that more opportunities to apply that logic will present themselves.

Meanwhile, it's time to move ahead with discussions of the real issues around meters. Are end-user meters' efficiencies and data outputs worth the cost? Are premise meters necessary for distribution automation functionality? Are data privacy measures sufficient? Should meters be designed to ensure no in-home electrical use can be detected except in aggregate, for billing? Will there be expensive swap-outs if some meters don't allow further systems integration?

The new Texas study, however, is a handy reference for everyone in the power industry to read and understand and recommend to concerned citizens.

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