

Electric Smart Grid Is More About Government Snooping Than Energy Savings

If you haven't heard of the "smart grid", you probably will soon. It is a notion that has been pushed by the Obama administration as a way to save energy. But the only real functions of the grid are to snoop on individual energy use and to sell your energy usage data to third parties. So much for personal privacy in your own home.

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Last year we asked the question, "Why does the government need to know if your oven is on?" It became a legitimate question after the federal government started pushing power companies to install so called "smart meters" in homes. Power companies are telling consumers that the purpose for the meters is to cut costs "they will no longer have to send a meter reader to your house with these meters" and to help the consumer monitor their electric usage.

But the more we learn about the smart grid, the less we believe the story we're being told.

The federal government is attempting to force electronics manufacturers to install technology in the products you buy that will actually identify those products and their usage. The upside to consumers is that you will actually be able to log onto the internet and see exactly which appliances are being used and how much electricity they are consuming in real time. The downside to the consumer is that both your utility company and the government will also have access to this data. This along may be the best reason yet to get off the grid.

When fully developed, the technology will also allow the government or your utility company to selectively turn off certain appliances without shutting down your entire house. So if you're using your air conditioning too much, they can limit you. You can bet that as demand for electricity increases, the grid will be used for rationing.

The people that have the most to worry about here are those who currently get their electricity from coal fired power plants. Due to new EPA rules set to go into effect, a large number of these plants are now slated to close. Some portions of the country will lose as much as 20% of their electricity production capacity and there are no viable replacement options for this capacity in the short term. The net effect will be either rolling black-outs or, if enough people are on the smart grid, selective rationing. These are the only options.

Unfortunately, the smart grid is also being extended to water meters. Given the fact that large areas of the southwest are arid, you can again bet that the smart grid will be used to monitor water usage in real time. And again, there is a good chance that rationing will ensue.

Some states and municipalities have begun to catch on. A number of local governments have passed laws that allow consumers to refuse the installation of smart meters (for a fee) or have postponed their introduction while privacy issues are studied. But disappointingly enough, even privacy rights friendly California has missed the mark at the state level.

California's Public Utility Commission recently announced rules that are supposed to protect the privacy of the data collected via smart meters! at least that is the line they are trying to feed the public. But the rules adopted repeatedly state that they are not intended to prevent the sale of the data generated by smart meters to other third parties! How do rules like this do anything to protect privacy?

At some point, the use of smart meter monitoring will likely be challenged in court. That's especially true if it is used by the government. After all, because it provides a minute by minute record of power usage, it will tell a lot about you. For instance, it will be hard for you to claim that you were at home if your power wasn't turned on for a couple of days.

And because the data will be accessible via the internet, it will also be available to hackers, stalkers, crooks! you name it. Anyone with a little ingenuity will be able to get their hands on your usage data.

For now, if you have the option of refusing the installation of a smart meter in your home, you are probably wise to do so. Millions of homes have already had them installed, and by the end of this decade, the plan " at least the federal governments plan " is to have nearly the entire nation converted.

by Jim Malmberg

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