

A New Health Hazard?

The coming fight over smart meters

What we have here – is a failure to communicate. At least that is what EWEB, our self-defined “customer owned and transparent” public utility, seems to be saying. They (vs. us?) have been laying the groundwork over the past several years to spend \$30 million on a new kind of electric meter for us. We get to pay (perhaps \$500 each) for what is looking like an expensive, intrusive and maybe dangerous gadget to replace the formerly sturdy and harmless electric meter. EWEB research indicates that people do not know much about “smart” meters. Well, perhaps we have not been informed of very much.



A recent R-G op-ed by Roger Gray, EWEB general manager, assured us that the coming smart meters (and they are coming, if not stopped) are a good thing. They would provide an efficient two-way radio signal using microwaves to transmit detailed data from residences to EWEB. The utility would then send the information back to customers so they might adjust their bad usage habits accordingly. Another “advantage” is that time of use data allows charging more for peak use – to reward turning off air conditioning when it is hot, I guess. If not compliant, you pay.

“Smart” meters thus provide very detailed information for three purposes: 1) to show customers in detail how and when they use electricity, 2) to document time of use information so higher rates can be charged, and 3) to allow control signals from utility to homes. (i.e., shutting off power – and in the future controlling home appliances with a signal from EWEB.)

Coming soon are imbedded appliance chips which will allow transmissions from EWEB to turn off or adjust thermostats on the air conditioners and furnaces in private homes. Some California homes with smart meters have been raided by police for overuse of electricity (probable cause for marijuana grow lights). Also, it is feared the signals could be hacked, informing criminals when residents are not at home.

Once the often quirky meters are installed people can only protest, or sue, probably all in vain. Once installed, or even contracted for, it is too late to go back. Here in Eugene, it is not too late – yet.

Perhaps the most telling reason to wait and not install these meters is the uncertainty surrounding health effects. Gray stated that the meters will transmit “less than 10 seconds a day,” seeming to negate all health concerns.

But this is true only in the most technical sense that the download for the day to EWEB will be a burst. However, to collect data, houses must be interconnected in a “mesh” of meters, signaling each other nearly constantly with directed microwaves collecting data 24/7. Obviously, many health professionals are not worried about the download, but the data collection microwave signals coursing through homes and the unknown health effects from living in the microwave fog of a “mesh.”

It is PR, not science, to claim the risk is “one-onehundredth (sic) of what is emitted from a cell phone,” as EWEB has been doing. Worldwide, many scientists are proposing the Precautionary Principle (i.e., not enough data on safety – wait, do not expose people). It is known that exposures are cumulative, and one final small exposure could cause a cancer. To make up your own mind just Google smart meters and check YouTube to listen to scientists’ warnings.

Historically, the vast majority of public health success stories have been bans. Lead in gasoline is one. And the famous John Snow in the 1854 cholera epidemic in London just removed pump handles so infected water was unavailable. Time to remove the handle, folks! We are set to pay for fragile and dangerous meters, and EWEB is not a private concern. In no sense are smart meters needed by customers. Power companies, like all companies, seem to love control and high technology solutions, even when inappropriate, and to gather ever more information. But the costs are too high here, and the unknowns far too potentially dangerous to risk groups – like children, the elderly and sensitive people.

Bottom line for smart meters: Just don't do it!

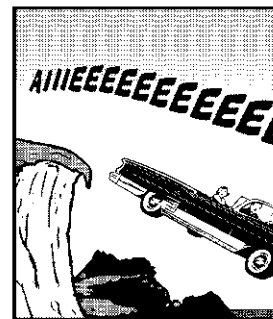
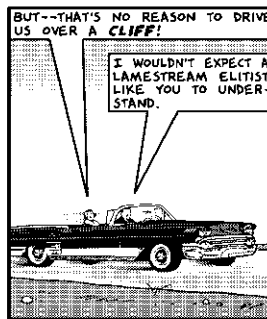
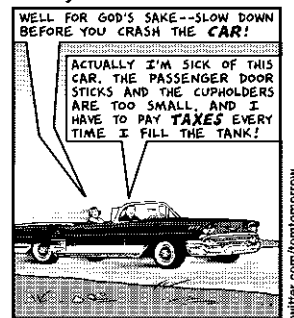
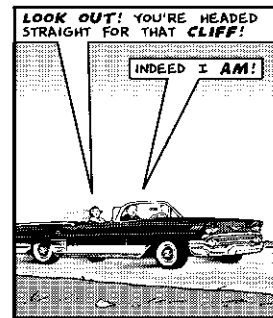
Michael E. Lee, Ph.D. worked for six years as research director at the University of Minnesota Public Interest Research Group, and for 10 years was an adjunct research scientist at Oregon Research Institute. For more information on smart meters, contact Kathy Ging at 342-8461 or kathy@kathyging.com

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

TEA PARTY Nihilists

ANOTHER IN AN OCCASIONAL SERIES OF PARABLES INVOLVING CLIFFS



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RUDE DUDE SPEAKS

Driving around Eugene in my politically correct Prius I am mostly polite. But this is a pretense by which I achieve, if not invisibility, at least some modicum of non-noticeability. Actually I am a misanthropic old codger widely viewed as a real rude dude. I always feel ridiculous even participating minimally in this stupid, diseased culture.

Luckily for Eugene the presence of my wife tends to ameliorate hostile outbursts and encourage a diplomatic demeanor, especially in the fall when university students swell the ranks of imbeciles one encounters on the streets. Don't want the old gal to start shrieking because I take a notion to bestow a lesson, sans tuition, on one of the arrogant little twerps.

However, my wife is not always present while I am politely tooling around town. Then those cocky campus brats better beware. Want to play the punk who swerves from lane to lane, kicking in the afterburners when unoccupied pavement appears, terrorizing cyclists and pedestrians? I am not always the most astute when it comes to taking my medication and something snaps in my brain and I'll be on your tailpipe like white on rice. Congratulations, you've acquired the attention of someone who not only despises the hokey legal system but champion chumps like you who make the hokey legal system marginally significant. You now have a double dose of rage locked on your bratty butt like a Sidewinder missile on a MiG-17.

Your only reasonable recourse at this point is to pull over and endure one of my five-minute polysyllabic jeremiads, for which I am so famous. Believe me, I'll not squander much time. After all, if you had any brains you wouldn't be pickling the neural mush slopping around in your skull at an institution of liar earnings ... er, higher learnings.

*David H. Tyson
Eugene*

KNOCK DOWN THE DOORS

Our new school year is stacking up better than the Republicans and other right-wingers could have dreamed! At one elementary

school in Eugene where class sizes reach 37 students (in classrooms built in the 1950s to hold 20), experienced and gifted teachers were crying in the hallways during the first week of class because it is impossible to give attention to individual students in a class of 36. The expected increase in class size of four students somehow changed over the summer. At this school, class sizes increased by 10 to 13 students.

Districtwide, teachers and staff hours and pay were cut, many staff and teachers were dismissed, four elementary schools were closed, classrooms that were stuffed to maximum capacity last year now are over capacity, and each teacher has to teach more students in less time. Meanwhile, administrators at district headquarters got raises.

If I were a parent, I'd be knocking down the doors at district headquarters, demanding the district respond to this emergency by making more resources (money, classrooms, teachers, staff, supplies) available in the classrooms, now, this week.

This doesn't mean we have to build bigger schools with bigger classrooms in which one teacher can “manage” 40 8-year-olds, as corporate bullies insist. That is not what children need!

*Ann M. Tattersall
Eugene*

NO SMEAR CAMPAIGN

When south Eugene voters elect a county commissioner to serve again and again, we do so for solid reasons. We choose someone dedicated to progressive values, great quality of life, open government and the natural world — someone prepared and accessible. That's why Pete Sorenson has been our commissioner since 1996.

Pete's diligent support for schools, parks and public participation is well known. He is consistently engaged in a substantial range of concerns. At town halls, on radio, in the courthouse and through his helpful responsiveness to constituents, Pete wholeheartedly goes the extra mile.

Hopefully, there will not be a smear campaign based on the bogus lawsuit under Open Meetings Law. The judge reached conclusions far beyond the statute, yet the new majority refused to challenge his decision.

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