

# QUICK FACTS ABOUT SMART METERS

The Commission has received many questions about BC Hydro's Smart Metering Program. Commission staff reviewed these inquiries and identified the most commonly asked questions. This information sheet is designed to address those questions. For more information, please visit any of the links provided below.

# 1. Why is BC Hydro installing Smart Meters?

The objectives of BC Hydro's Smart Metering Program are to modernize the electricity grid and keep up with growth in demand. The benefits of a modern grid include reducing rate pressures and providing customers with enhanced service options. Some of the specific benefits outlined by BC Hydro include:

- a. Faster power outage notification and restoration
- b. Improved system efficiency and reduced waste
- c. Reduced electricity theft

Additional information can be found at:

http://www.bchydro.com/energy\_in\_bc/projects/smart\_metering\_infrastructure\_program/benefits.html.

BC Hydro is also required by law, under the *Clean Energy Act* and the *Smart Meter and Smart Grid Regulation*, to install Smart Meters for each of its 1.8 million customers by the end of 2012.

## 2. What is the Clean Energy Act?

The *Clean Energy Act* was implemented following the provincial government's 2007 BC Energy Plan. The Act outlines three priority areas:

- a. Ensuring electricity self-sufficiency at low rates
- b. Harnessing BC's clean power potential to create jobs in every region
- c. Strengthening environmental stewardship and reducing greenhouse gases

The *Clean Energy Act* sets out the requirements for BC Hydro's Smart Metering Program, including the project completion date and the necessary system capabilities.

# 3. What is the British Columbia Utilities Commission's role in the Smart Metering Program?

The Clean Energy Act exempts the Smart Metering Program from sections 45-47 and 71 of the Utilities Commission Act. As a result, the British Columbia Utilities Commission (Commission) has not been

involved in the planning phase and approval of the project. The Commission maintains the authority to conduct a prudency review of the decisions affecting costs included in rates.

# 4. What action is being taken to ensure Smart Meters do not violate customer privacy?

The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner (OIPC) conducted an investigation into the Smart Metering Program and published its findings in a December 2011 report titled, "Investigation Report F11-03: British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority."

The report found BC Hydro is complying with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) regarding the collection, use, disclosure, protection and retention of personal information. However, the OIPC found BC Hydro is not complying with the FIPPA requirements to notify customers of the purposes for collecting the personal information and the legal authority for the collection; and to provide the contact information for a person within BC Hydro who can answer questions regarding the information collection. The report includes a series of recommendations to help BC Hydro comply with these requirements. BC Hydro committed to address these recommendations, and the OIPC will continue to monitor the Smart Metering Program to assist BC Hydro in implementing the recommendations.

#### 5. What information is available regarding Smart Meters and health safety?

The Commission considers the Electromagnetic Field (EMF) exposure guidelines established by organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) and Health Canada to be relevant and useful reference points for considering the safety of EMF levels.

"Extremely low levels" are used to describe EMFs produced by the transmission and use of electricity. A 2011 BC Centre for Disease Control report found that Smart Meters produced less than 3.3 percent of the allowable EMF exposure of Health Canada Safety Code 6 and less than 4.4 percent of the limit from ICNIRP.

While BC Hydro is only required to meet the EMF exposure guidelines established by Health Canada, it investigated EMF exposure guidelines around the world and found the exposure created by its Smart Meters is less than the allowable limits of the most precautionary approaches, including Switzerland's exposure maximum for highly sensitive areas such as hospitals and schools. More information on Smart Meters and Radiofrequency can be found on BC Hydro's website at <a href="http://www.bchydro.com/energy">http://www.bchydro.com/energy</a> in <a href="http://projects/smart\_metering\_infrastructure\_program/faqs/radio\_frequency.html">http://www.bchydro.com/energy</a> in <a href="http://projects/smart\_metering\_infrastructure\_program/faqs/radio\_frequency.html">http://projects/smart\_metering\_infrastructure\_program/faqs/radio\_frequency.html</a>.

# 6. Can BC Hydro remove my existing meter and install a Smart Meter on my property without my consent?

BC Hydro's *Electric Tariff* (Tariff) is the legal service agreement between BC Hydro and its customers. The Tariff applies to all BC Hydro customers and is designed to ensure consistent and fair treatment.

All meters are the property of BC Hydro. According to section 9.5 of the Tariff, BC Hydro has the authority to access its meters and electricity supplying equipment on customer property, unless the meter or electrical supplying equipment is located inside the home.

The Clean Energy Act gives BC Hydro the authority to access any land, other than a private dwelling, in order to perform functions related to its meters, including Smart Meters and its smart grid. Unless your meter is located inside your home, BC Hydro can install a Smart Meter on your property without your consent. BC Hydro is taking steps to ensure that customers are informed prior to Smart Meter installations. These steps include sending notification letters to customers prior to installation and having technicians knock on customers' doors to inform them of the installation. Customers do not have to be home, however, for the technician to perform the installation.

# 7. Where can I find out more about Smart Meters and the information provided above?

Visit any of the following links for more information on Smart Meters and the existing regulation.

#### Clean Energy Act (Bill 17 - 2010)

http://www.leg.bc.ca/39th2nd/1st\_read/gov17-1.htm

#### Smart Meters and Smart Grid Regulation (BC Reg 368/2010)

http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws new/document/ID/freeside/368 2010

## The BC Energy Plan

http://www.energyplan.gov.bc.ca/

#### **Utilities Commission Act**

http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws\_new/document/ID/freeside/00\_96473\_01

#### **BC Hydro's Electric Tariff**

http://www.bchydro.com/youraccount/content/electric tariff.jsp

#### **BC Hydro's Smart Metering Program**

http://www.bchydro.com/smartmeters

#### BC Hydro's FAQ on Smart Meters and Radio Frequency

http://www.bchydro.com/smartmeters safety

#### Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner - Smart Meter Investigation

http://www.oipc.bc.ca/index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&catid=19%3Aorders-&id=116%3Apublic-sector-g-investigation-reports&Itemid=85

#### BC Centre for Disease Control – Report on Radio Frequency and Smart Meters

http://www.bccdc.ca/healthenv/Radiation/ElectromagRadiation/SmartMeters.htm

#### **Health Canada and Smart Meters**

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/prod/meters-compteurs-eng.php

#### The World Health Organization - What is EMF (Electromagnetic Fields)?

http://www.who.int/peh-emf/about/WhatisEMF/en/

The International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection – EMF Publications http://www.icnirp.de/PubEMF.htm