

# SEATTLE PRIVACY COALITION

## Q. What is a Smart Meter?

A. For this discussion, a smart meter is a wireless device installed at your residence to monitor energy consumption (usually electricity, but can include gas or water usage) that replaces your traditional energy meter. In Seattle, smart meters operate under the Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) initiative. (Businesses also use smart meters, and some are connected directly to landlines or telecoms; they aren't exclusively wireless.)

## Q. Why are Smart Meters becoming more common?

A. Most utilities promote smart meters for two primary reasons:  
Better monitoring of energy usage, which utilities use to more accurately match energy supply with energy demand over peak and low-usage periods  
Alleged lower cost of operation than traditional meters, which require meter reader personnel. Typically, a smart meter transmits information directly to the utility, so staff people don't have to travel to your residence or business to read a meter.

## Q. Why are privacy advocates concerned about Smart Meters?

*Smart Meters are data collection devices by design.* In the absence of standards and legal limits on data gathering, how data is transmitted from your home, and who can have access to that data, the potential for misuse of the data is not addressed by current installations in any way. Data related to personal and private activities that occur within our homes becomes available to potential bad actors. (For example, criminals seeking to break into a home could monitor energy use to determine when people are away.)

*Precedent.* Smart meters represent a significant step toward implementation of the Internet of Things, that is, connection of devices on your body and within your home to the Internet for the purposes of optimizing performance, service, and remote control. While there is great potential for these connected technologies, their development in the absence of any regulatory structure or consideration of privacy concerns is alarming. (For example, at the time of this writing it is unclear whether the Federal Wiretap Act authorizes utilities to provide law enforcement with the ability to access smart meter data without a warrant.)

*Opaque procurement process.* Decision-making about smart meter systems, technical specs and capabilities, are not subject to public review. Manufacturers of smart meter devices are able to make claims to public personnel that go unreviewed and unchallenged by third parties with technical expertise and no stake in the outcome, and the devices in turn become a de facto standard, again without proper vetting and discussion by and with those affected.

*Data management.* Privacy advocates are concerned about smart meters for the same reasons they are concerned about automatic license plate readers (ALPRs), traffic- and toll-camera data storage, and CCTV network data: Currently the absence of standards, regulation, or transparent decision-making allows for both indirect and in some cases, willful abuse of data about individuals that has never before been available and in such potential quantity (Smart Meters would be broadcasting 24-7.)

**Q. Besides privacy concerns, are there other problems with Smart Meters?**

A. Yes. Several groups have come forward with potential health concerns about radiation and network emissions which warrant further study.

Also, the touted cost and maintenance benefits of Smart Meters have been usually way overstated if they even exist at all. In other words, a solution looking for a nonexistent problem.

Finally, the cost of purchasing and implementation aren't borne by the utility anyway - they are passed on to homeowners and businesses who had little to no input into their purchase, nor in some cases may even have the ability to pay the extra charges for such systems.

**Q. How can I find out more?**

A. Visit the following web sites for more information.

Consumers Digest

<http://www.consumersdigest.com/special-reports/why-smart-meters-might-be-a-dumb-idea/view-all>

Pew Research Internet Project

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2012/06/29/main-findings-the-fate-of-smart-systems/>

Seattle Privacy.org

<https://www.seattleprivacy.org/advanced-metering-devices-and-customer-choice/>

Wikipedia

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smart\\_meter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smart_meter)

**Q. What steps can I take to help protect my privacy from Smart Meters?**

A. Seattle City Light is still in the process of implementing the Advanced Metering Infrastructure. That makes this the perfect time to contact city officials and employees with your opinion. Here are a few suggestions:

**1) Opt Out.**

- Send a letter, make a phone call, send an email, or better yet - **do all three**, to Seattle City Light Director Jorge Corrasco and cc Mayor Murray and the members of the Seattle City Council, Identify yourself as a City Light customer and state that you want to opt out of the program, and do not want a smart meter installed on or in your home. Find contact information on the Seattle Privacy Coalition website:

<https://www.seattleprivacy.org/how-to-email-seattle-council-and-get-on-the-new-privacy-committee-mailing-list/>

Contact information and information about the AMI program, are available at the City of Seattle website: <http://www.seattle.gov/light/ami/>

**2) Participate.** Attend and make your voice heard at local events like this one.

**3) Connect with Seattle Privacy Coalition.** If privacy is an important issue for you, we want to hear from you. Join our mailing list, watch our Twitter feed, and participate in the conversation.

**SEATTLE PRIVACY COALITION**