

DAMAGED APPLIANCES *from* STOPSMARTMETERSBC.CA

Smart Meter 'nuked' breaker, stove

<http://www.mapleridgenews.com/news/137526583.html>

By Phil Melnychuk - Maple Ridge News

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She lost a freezer-load of food just before Christmas, her microwave oven was zapped beyond repair, two computer chips on her new stove were fried and the breaker for her hot water tank damaged.

It all adds up to about \$1,000 and Nicole Driedger wants B.C. Hydro to pay the bill because she says the damage was caused by the installation of a Smart Meter on her Stonehouse Avenue home, Dec. 19.

"I'm not the only person this is happening to," Driedger said Tuesday.

"There are people all over Maple Ridge that this is happening to."

Driedger says the damage was caused as a worker was installing the new meter on the side of her house.

She says something was jarred in the process and caused a surge in electricity, which led to the damage of the electrical appliances.

That led to a \$450 bill from the electrician who repaired the breaker switch and who also checked the rest of her house. "It's nothing to do with the functioning of the house, or the wiring of the house.

"He told me there was nothing wrong with the house."

Driedger and her family has been in the house in west Maple Ridge for only a year and already had an electrical inspection done when they bought the house.

She says her other electronics all have surge protectors on them, so they weren't damaged. Her fridge wasn't on at the time, so it wasn't affected, she added.

She was told the proper way to install a meter is to first shut off all the secondary breakers in the house, followed by the main breaker, after which the install can take place.

Driedger called B.C. Hydro, then was referred to Corix, the company that's installing the new meters for B.C. Hydro.

Corix said it wouldn't process her claim, so Driedger called B.C. Hydro again. She waited 10 days before getting a response and was only told to submit her claim denial from Corix to B.C. Hydro, so Hydro could submit it to its own claim department.

Driedger said a friend told her to claim it on her house insurance, but she's worried about her premiums increasing. When the spoiled food is included, resulting from a resetting of the deep freeze also caused by the power surge, she lost about \$1,000.

"I'm not asking for all new appliances. I just want the repairs done, that's all, because I have all new appliances."

However, Cindy Verschoor, manager of communications for the Smart Meter program, said damage resulting from meter replacement is rare. B.C. Hydro replaces about 45,000 meters a year even without the smart meter program. So far, B.C. Hydro has replaced about 616,000 meters across the province.

"A normal appliance should be able to withstanding being plugged in and unplugged and the process of installing a meter is no different," Verschoor said.



Smart move?

South Delta

Gary Fielding holds up the main board of his oven unit, which he says was seriously damaged after Corix Utilities installed his new BC Hydro Smart Meter.

By **Christine Lyon – South Delta Leader**

Published: **December 16, 2011 4:54 PM**

Gary Fielding is \$845 poorer and is pointing his finger at the province's power supplier for the unexpected financial blow. The Tsawwassen resident claims the installation of his new BC Hydro Smart Meter blew a fuse and damaged his oven, which required costly repairs.

"It fried the brain, basically," Fielding said, holding up the microchip-laden central processing unit that controls both his oven and microwave.

An electrician since 1967, Fielding claims the wall-mounted oven unit was compromised due to a power surge when the old meter was removed while under "house" utility load.

But more than one month after the incident, Fielding is no closer to getting his costs covered. Corix Utilities, the company contracted by BC Hydro to install 1.8 million new wireless meters across the province, recently denied any liability.

"It sort of sickens me that these big corporations don't take responsibility for their actions. They say, 'No, go away, I'm not going to give you the time of day,'" Fielding says.

Claim denied

Fielding's 18-year-old son Will Gale was home playing video games Nov. 15 when he heard a noise in the garage. Upon investigation, he discovered the family's old BC Hydro meter was being replaced with a Smart Meter. The power went out for a few minutes, after which Gale discovered the microwave was not working. Fielding arrived home from work later that afternoon to discover the oven was also broken. All other household appliances and electronics were operating normally, he said.

Fielding faxed Corix the bill from Trail Appliances, which included repair costs, service calls and taxes. But Corix responded with a letter dated Dec. 6 from Jennifer Toledo, insurance administrator, denying liability in the claim.

"We are unable to provide reimbursement for any expenses that you may have incurred," Toledo wrote.

The letter said Corix followed "all company safety and installation procedures" and the alleged property damage "was not caused by the recent smart meter installation."

A spokesperson for Corix further explained the situation.

"I believe that our people investigated it and determined that the changeout of the meter was not the cause of the effect on the oven," said Jack Touhey, vice-president of public and government affairs at Corix.

He said meter installers follow a prescribed procedure upon arrival at a home.

"They try to communicate with the homeowner or resident by knocking on the door, and if someone's there, telling them that they're about to change the meter," he said.

"The meter changeout is just a few minutes and it's really no different than what a temporary power outage would do or a quick flick of the main power switch off and on that a repair person might do," he said.

Touhey said there have been rare cases when the power going off and on may be "the last leg" for an older appliance.

"Everything after the meter is owned by a homeowner and electrical systems can be at varying stages of age and capability, and this changeout may expose some of those issues," he said.

He said Corix investigates all claims of damaged appliances.

"If, and it's very rare, we believe that it's caused by the meter changeout, unfortunately the repair cost is the customer's responsibility.

Installation concern

As an electrician, Fielding said he takes issue with the Smart Meter installation process. Though he did receive advance notice that meter installers would be in his area, he said no one knocked on his door upon arrival.

"You can imagine if somebody was on life support and they (installers) just come in and yank the meter, and the backup power isn't there," he said.

But Cindy Verschoor, spokesperson for BC Hydro's Smart Metering Program, said meter exchanges are simple, routine procedures.

"There is actually no precedent that exchanging a meter is really any different than plugging or unplugging an appliance or even an outage," she said.

To date, almost 78,000 meters have been installed in the Richmond/Delta area with another 24,000 to go. While Verschoor would not speculate on the cause of Fielding's oven failure, she said BC Hydro's customer care team would investigate a claim like his "thoroughly."

"I'm not aware of any cases where there's been a failed appliance where we've reimbursed the customer," she said.

Health and safety matters

Smart Meters have been criticized by some who say the wireless devices are an invasion of privacy and pose health and safety hazards.

One local resident sent a letter to BC Hydro and Corix refusing the installation of a Smart Meter on her property.

"It has the capability of being a surveillance system, used by you or other parties, which could violate my right to privacy," wrote Tsawwassen's Heather Colls, adding she has a right to protect her health from "a possible carcinogen, specifically radiofrequency electromagnetic fields" emitted by Smart Meters.

Tsawwassen's George and Elisabeth Bradley have also attempted to block installation of a Smart Meter.

"We fear that it will contaminate our home with radio-frequency radiation which is a dangerous toxin that has been classified by the World Health Organization/International Agency for Research of Cancer as 'possibly carcinogenic to humans,'" they wrote.

Ladner resident and former B.C. premier Bill Vander Zalm last month asked Delta council to take action to stop the installation of Smart Meters in Delta until further research has been done.

"Why should we allow the provincial government and the BC Hydro to play Russian Roulette with our health and well being?" he wrote. "If the provincial government (ala BC Hydro) has a billion dollars to spend—there are many social needs, during a time of recession, that are far more in need than changing meters," Vander Zalm wrote.

BC Hydro defends the safety of the wireless devices, saying residential Smart Meters are active for an average of one minute per day and the exposure to radio frequency from a Smart Meter, over its entire 20-year life span, is equal to a single 30-minute cell phone call.

BC Hydro says the new meters will allow power to be restored faster in the event of a power outage, and they are expected to save customers \$1.6 billion in avoided costs and increased efficiencies over next 20 years.

The Clean Energy Act of May 2010 mandates that BC Hydro replace every old meter with a smart meter by the end of 2012, with or without the consent of the homeowner.

Meanwhile, Fielding believes the changeover is a "money grab" that could result in BC Hydro charging more during peak electricity usage hours.

He said he will continue to pursue the electricity giant to reimburse him for his oven repair costs.

<http://www.southdeltaleader.com/community/135689703.html>



Fridge blows after smart meter installed

Richmond Review

Shellmont resident Jack Rochfort was forced to buy a new refrigerator after his blew following the installation of a smart meter at his 42-year-old Richmond home.

Matthew Hoekstra photo

By Matthew Hoekstra – Richmond Review

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An 81-year-old Richmond man is out \$787.16 after his refrigerator blew following the installation of a

BC Hydro smart meter at his Shellmont home.

On Aug. 5, a contractor from Corix Utilities arrived at Jack Rochfort's home to install a new meter as part of BC Hydro's province-wide smart meter replacement program. Rochfort said his 10-year-old refrigerator was working fine that

morning—until the power went out.

Unaware his mechanical meter was being replaced, Rochfort thought little of a brief power outage, noticing electricity was restored to his home within a few minutes. It was then his refrigerator began making noise.

He called a repairman, who, after charging \$76.16 for the service call, suggested a power surge could have caused his refrigerator's compressor to fail.

Rochfort bought a new fridge for \$711, and appealed to Corix. But the company couriered him a letter dated Aug. 18 that denied responsibility for the failure of his appliance.

"Corix followed all company safety and installation procedures," wrote Jennifer Toledo, an insurance administrator with Corix.

Rochfort, a retired truck driver who has lived in the same home since it was built in 1969, said he was notified about the installation about two weeks before it happened, but wasn't aware the contractor had arrived on the day.

"They should be notifying people before they do this," he said. "They should know that with older equipment, a power surge will take it down."

Richmond is one of the first cities to get smart meters—digital devices that can capture and record the amount of power that is consumed in a given period. BC Hydro aims to have 1.8 million smart meters installed in homes and businesses throughout the province by the end of 2012.

A form letter from the utility notifying residents about the pending installation says installers will knock at the front door of a home before starting work and power will be knocked out for one minute during the installation.

It suggests that homeowners ensure a backup power supply is available for critical equipment that requires constant power. The letter also warns a home security system may be triggered in the event of a power outage.

Rochfort called the process "heavy handed," insisting contractors should have to get permission from property owners before replacing meters.

But the chief project officer of BC Hydro's smart metering project said it's "highly improbable" meter replacement could cause appliances to fail. Gary Murphy said appliances are designed to withstand simple power interruptions, such as those caused by storms. Replacing a meter is no different.

"Old appliances or new appliances have an extremely low probability of having anything go wrong. It's like unplugging your refrigerator and plugging it back in. If there's difficulty with that, then the customer ought to be concerned and probably replace the refrigerator," said Murphy, who has worked on such projects throughout North America.

Murphy said customers have the right to appeal to BC Hydro if they're not satisfied with a response from Corix. BC Hydro would then investigate the claim.

Installation contractors are not certified electricians, but Murphy said they needn't be. The replacement process, he noted, is as simple as removing a plug from a receptacle.

Nearly 10,000 meters have been installed in Richmond so far—about one-tenth of BC Hydro's Richmond-Delta billing area. Crews are also now working in Terrace, Prince George and Victoria. Contractors have the legal right to enter private property to service meters under the Electric Tariff.

Murphy said BC Hydro's method of communicating with customers regarding meter replacement—involving newspaper advertising and letters sent by mail—is "one of the best practices we've learned from numerous utilities, some of which don't contact customers at all."

"It's fairly standard business practice for us to replace meters, and it's quite complex and costly and time-consuming and frankly not cost-effective to schedule appointments with customers," he said.

The smart meter program will ultimately benefit BC Hydro customers, said Murphy, noting the utility will realize \$520 million in net benefits in the program's 20-year cycle.

"We know we have rate pressures to go up; we have to upgrade our infrastructure. But smart meters is one thing BC Hydro is doing to minimize those rate pressure increases."

Smart meters will also provide customers with information about their own energy use, offering further potential savings.

The Richmond Review asked the BC Safety Authority about necessary qualifications for meter replacement contractors.

Spokesperson Ariela Friedmann said only "trained individuals" should do the work—but not necessarily electricians. She also said a power surge caused by the installation of a new meter is unlikely.

"It's highly unlikely because the removal and installation involves opening and closing a circuit—much like using a switch. It doesn't generate voltage on its own."

Meanwhile, B.C. privacy commissioner Elizabeth Denham is investigating the smart meter program to ensure it complies with privacy law. The investigation will include the collection, use, disclosure, retention and security of personal information.

http://www.bclocalnews.com/richmond_southdelta/richmondreview/news/128323478.html

Smart meter conversion concerns Resident blames BC Hydro for fried computer

BY TYLER OLSEN, THE TIMES DECEMBER 20, 2011

A Chilliwack man whose computer was fried by a power surge while having a BC Hydro smart meter installed says hydro customers should be warned to unplug any electronics or turn their breakers off on the day of their meter changeover.

Sven Tornlov said he thinks the smart meters are a good idea that will save the province money. But he says he's now faced with a steep bill to replace his computer after its motherboard died.

Tornlov was home last Thursday when a Corix Utilities worker appeared and said she was turning the power off in two minutes. Tornlov said pamphlets mailed to his house warn users to turn off all electronics. But he says there is no mention that they still may be at risk in case of a power surge.

"In their literature and the way they talk is it just sounds like it's just plug and play," said Tornlov.

BC Hydro's website says that when it comes time for a smart meter to be installed, "The installer will knock on your door and if you are home they will notify you of the exchange and give you time to shutdown and unplug any equipment, such as your computer."

But Tornlov said he was never told to unplug his computer.

"They don't say anything verbally," he said.

And the letter mailed to residents' houses gives no such advice. Tornlov said that immediately after the meter was installed, the lights in his house began flickering and his computer didn't reboot. When he took the computer to a repair shop, he said a worker told him "during this time, when they're doing all this stuff, it will be increased business for me." Tornlov said he called BC Hydro to see if they would compensate him, but said he was told that the public utility doesn't guarantee continual power, that it would not have caused a power surge, and that even if it did, he should have called a line for those with "special electronics."

But Tornlov said there is nothing about his computer that would make him consider it "special" in 2011.

"You think the common courtesy would be at the door to remind you at that point in time," he said. "I'm an accountant, I'm not an electrician, so why am I the guy who has to come up with the idea: 'Wow, if I had flipped my breaker, there would have been no chance of a problem.'"

But Cindy Verschoor, BC Hydro's manager of communications for smart meters, said the installation of a smart meter should not cause a power surge.

"It's like unplugging a plug," she said. "It doesn't result in a power surge or anything like that on a regular residential home."

She speculated that faulty or old wiring could be to blame for any problems surrounding the installation of the smart meters.

"Like any piece of equipment, the wiring in your home can erode over time and we have no way of knowing the condition of your wiring when we exchange your meter, and that's why we just let customers know they might want to turn things off just in case. But the reality is that it's not because we're exchanging the meter. It's just an extra precaution."

Verschoor also said that residents are told to unplug their computers to ensure that anything they are working on is not lost when the power goes out. She said that people do not, actually, have to unplug their computers, but just turn them off.

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