

VIA REGISTERED MAIL

Hon. Bill Bennett
Minister of Energy and Mines
Room 301
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

June 25, 2015

Dear Mr. Bennett:

In 2012 Armen Kassabian, Ontario Fire Marshal, wrote a report that expressed serious concerns about the safety of smart meters, regardless of the brand. They fail. They melt. They burn.

<http://www.stopsmartmeters.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/FireMarshallReportSmartMeterFires-Canada.pdf>

Mr. Bennett, for the last 2 years I have been tracking smart meter failures in British Columbia, and have provided you with evidence showing that there is justification for major concern. Just like the Sensus smart meters in Saskatchewan, the Itron meters in BC have overheated, melted and burned. More failures have occurred in BC than in Saskatchewan, yet you and BC Hydro have taken no steps to ensure the public's safety. In fact, you and BC Hydro have denied that these meters have failed or put lives at risk.

There is now evidence that you cannot – must not – ignore.

With this letter I have provided a printed copy of a recent lawsuit in Texas that contains testimony given under oath by journeyman linesmen who have worked for utilities for many years. They state that ITRON Openway meters used by Centerpoint Energy in Houston, the very same model being used by BC Hydro and Fortis BC, have failed in large numbers. This document also is available at

http://www.stopsmartmetersbc.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Reed_Answering_Brief-1.pdf

Of particular note:

- 1) Those testifying had confirmed fires and failures with other linesmen and trouble-shooters prior to making the statements. Pg. 25
- 2) The linesmen reported that the utility had “two pallets of burned up (Itron) meters”. Pg. 8
- 3) The linesmen reported problems with “meters’ communication with the remote site control and many issues with meters melting and burning up.” Pg. 8
- 4) Linesmen determined that “part of the problem was a loose connection between the meter and the meter base because the smart meters had thinner “blades” than the previous analog meters” (emphasis added) Pg. 8 This gap could cause arcing leading to fires.
- 5) Concerns were raised about the ITRON smart meters “creating arc flashes, which could burn the customers’ wiring and create ‘hazardous conditions.’ ...These hazardous conditions include potentially

causing arc flashes, which could result in anything from minor to third degree burns to technicians who remove the meters.” Pg. 8

6) An experienced trouble-shooter for a utility reported that he had “responded to more fire calls once the smart meters were deployed and these often involved heating problems at the meter base.” Pg. 13

7) “ Reed's testimony concerned products used by Respondent. Landis + Gyr is the manufacturer of the AMS meter used by Respondent and Itron is the manufacturer of the meters used by CenterPoint Energy in Houston.” Pg. 25

The model used in Houston is the ITRON C2SOD, Openway Centron II the same model used by BC Hydro and Fortis BC.

<http://www.centerpointenergy.com/staticfiles/CNP/Common/SiteAssets/doc/How%20to%20Read%20Your%20Smart%20Meter%20042010.pdf>

8) At Oncor and Centerpoint there was a consistent corporate message that utility employees are to tell customers that any problem, whether it's damaged appliances or a fire, was due to the meter base which is owned by the client, not the smart meter. Pg. 10. This is the same message that, according to Hydro insiders, BC Hydro has given to its employees.

Mr. Bennett, I could provide you with many statistics and data that I have gathered over the last 2 years that would help explain why the meters are a fire hazard, but I believe that is unnecessary. I have provided you with most of them already. Instead I will summarize what I have found in addition to the details provided above:

1) Electronic digital and smart meters -- which are combustible and vulnerable to heat -- should have reliable means for immediately disconnecting them from the grid in the entirely foreseeable event of circuit failure (lithium-metal batteries, diodes, electrolytic capacitors, transistors, etc.). Such reliable means are apparently not provided. With an effectively unlimited current supply from the grid this lack of protection creates a significant fire risk when the meter is combustible as is the ITRON smart meter.

2) I've been told by knowledgeable people that the remote disconnect switch apparently is unreliable and poorly designed, having been implicated in fires across North American. To function it relies on other components of the meter that, in all likelihood, would be compromised in the event of overheating or other failures. Arcing, arc flash, and heating from the disconnect switch are also serious hazards that derive from the unprotected grid connection.

3) The meter installation process was questionable, given the lack of qualifications of the personnel recruited to carry out the installations. Use of inadequately qualified installation personnel significantly increases the risk of: (a) failure to observe existing meter base/wiring problems; and (b) damaging the base during exchange; both of these can lead to "hot sockets" with the attendant risk of fire.

4) The meter bases into which these meters are being placed were designed, tested, and CSA approved to hold an electro-mechanical analog meter which is not combustible. . Our multiple requests for proof of certification of the meter base in conjunction with a combustible electronic meter, either digital or smart meter, have been ignored. It is a highly questionable practice, probably illegal, to install electronic meters on a base designed and CSA tested/approved only for electro- mechanical analogue meters.

5) In BC the BC Safety Standards Act exempts BC Hydro and Fortis BC from having their equipment certified by CSA and smart meters have been determined to be utility equipment. The exemption is conditional under section 21-4 which states that utility equipment must be certified safe by a professional electrical engineer licensed in BC. BC Hydro stated it does not have this certification.

6) According to the Fire Commissioner's Office, BC Hydro is allowed to remove and has removed smart meters from scenes of fires before the fire inspection has been completed "since it is their meter." This runs counter to the BC Fire Safety Act.

7) BC Hydro has reported that no smart meter has been inspected in its laboratory, Power Tech, after it has failed. Instead all failed meters are returned immediately to Itron for replacement. I have been told in response to a Freedom of Information request that Hydro is doing no investigation to determine the reason for the failure.

8) There appears to be no agency that is tracking incidents involving smart meters.

The BC Utility Commission, according to the BC Utilities Commission Act, has responsibility to ensure BC Hydro's products and practices will not endanger the public. With regard to the smart meter program, the BCUC informs me this responsibility has been overruled by the Clean Energy Act and Direction 4 because it has been told it cannot interfere in the smart meter program in any way, even with regard to public safety.

The BC Safety Authority, which normally ensures that electrical devices are safe and that any unsafe devices are reported, advised me that they have been told that they have no authority regarding the smart meter program.

9) Fire reports have indicated the cause of some fires to be due to failed electrical distribution equipment. Len Garis, in the report commissioned by BC Hydro, stated that reference to electrical distribution equipment usually refers to meters.

10) Budgets to fire departments have been reduced to the point where departments do not have the resources to determine causes of all fires. Many fires are not reported even after 2 years. In addition, one fire chief told me that they were told to rule out arson, and not bother going further. As a result in many cases, the fire's cause is given as "undetermined." Of the fires for which I've requested reports from the Fire Commissioner, 50% have no determined cause!

11) Because of the lack of resources, investigations are carried out by people with limited electrical fire forensics ability, and, therefore, it is possible that many fires that might be associated with smart meters are going undetected. As a result, it is possible that many problems are going undetected and unremedied, jeopardizing the property and lives of British Columbians.

12) Regulations in Quebec require that Hydro-Quebec ensures that smart meters are not within 3 meters of a propane tank. If the tank or meter cannot be removed, then the remote disconnect switch, which has been found to have been involved in fires in Saskatchewan, must be disabled. It seems prudent that similar precautionary measures should be taken regarding proximity of smart meters to any flammable materials. I wrote to you, Mr. Bennett, and BC Hydro authorities on June 4 asking what precautionary steps BC Hydro would be taking, and to date I received no response.

Our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 7, grants Canadian citizens the right to refuse actions by the government that the citizens believe to be harmful.

Further, “the Federal Court of Appeal has opened the door to lawsuits against government regulators for negligent administration of their regulatory schemes and created the possibility of suing a regulator for damages under public law if the regulator violates a clear duty to act or exercises its public power in an “irrational” or “clearly wrong” manner.” <http://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/beekeepers-abuzz-after-court-allows-clas-01297/>

Based upon the information I’ve provided to you, I believe it is safe to say that this smart meter program has major problems that cannot be ignored any longer. You, Mr. Bennett, as Minister of Energy, are responsible for allowing this program to continue. With receipt of this package of material, which I am sending via registered mail, you cannot say you didn’t know that these smart meters are fire hazards.

I am sure that your concern for the safety and welfare of your constituents is paramount. Based upon the information I’ve presented, this concern is best addressed by halting the program and removing the smart meters, pending an investigation.

Should you wish further information about anything that I’ve said, please ask.

Sincerely,

Sharon Noble