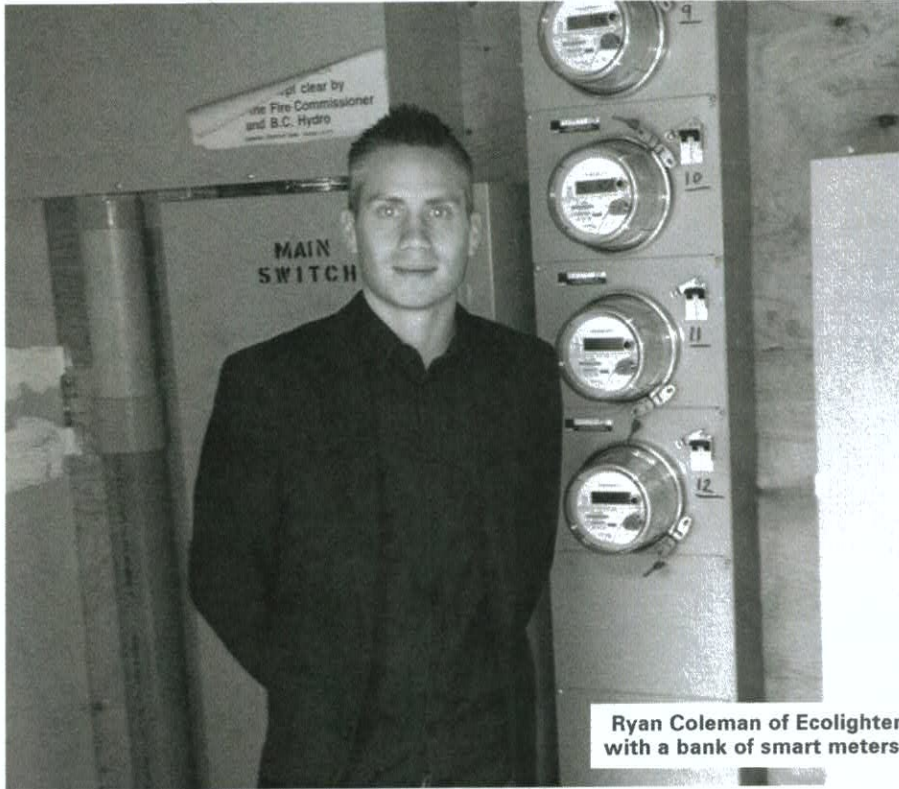


# Who's afraid of smart meters?

Ryan Coleman of Ecolighten Energy Solutions looks at the facts and tells us why he sees reason to expect good things



Ryan Coleman of Ecolighten with a bank of smart meters.

**"By allowing** two-way communication and real-time access to energy consumption, consumers are now in a position to make informed energy management decisions to help conserve energy in the home." *Ryan Coleman.*

Smart meters are digital meters that allow two-way communication between your home's energy use and the utility company. So, instead of estimated billing or a meter reader visiting your home, a smart meter will (ultimately) wirelessly communicate accurate energy usage directly with the utility company. A smart meter is also capable of providing you with "real time" electricity usage on your home. This will give you the opportunity to manage and monitor your electricity consumption daily instead

of getting a monthly bill after you've already used the energy.

However, there is much misinformation circulating online and elsewhere that has left people in search of the facts and wondering what the actual consumer benefits are. Let's address the myths around privacy and security, health, accuracy, and cost.

## • PRIVACY

Smart meters show how much energy you use in hourly intervals, not how you use that energy. Smart meters transmit your energy use directly to the utility which eliminates estimated bills and the potential for misreading or surprises on your electricity bill. And much like cable and banking industries, utilities keep your data private

and secure using advanced security and encryption technology to safeguard against data theft.

## • HEALTH

One of the more common myths is that smart meters are a health threat because they communicate using wireless signals. But Health Canada notes that the maximum power of the radiofrequency signals emitted by smart meters comply with Industry Canada regulations and because a meter is not held against your head, like a cell phone, the distribution of the exposure is like AM or FM radio broadcast signals. Even in multi-unit buildings where smart meters might be banked together, the total exposure levels are still far below Health Canada's limits because the transmissions happen so infrequently, once or twice a day.

## • ACCURACY

Despite rumours to the contrary, smart meters are not less accurate than analog meters. Smart meters are rigorously tested for accuracy. In addition to being governed by the British Columbia Electrical Safety Regulations, they are fully compliant with meter electrical safety and performance requirements from international authorities that govern electrical technology. Independent testing has proven that smart meters generate precise measurements.

## • COST

Yes, it costs BC Hydro to implement the smart meter program, but the goal is to modernize the grid and put more control over costs and energy use into the



*"...with energy management tools...you can now see how much energy you're using at different times and potentially reduce energy bills."*

hands of the consumers. Currently Hydro has committed to keeping rates low, even with big expenditures in upgrade projects and smart meters. But rates will likely rise in 2014 (see Vancouver Sun article by Scott Simpson Aug 7, 2012). A smart meter itself won't save you money. But with energy management tools like energy monitors, in-home displays or online energy dashboards you can now see how much energy you're using at different times of the day, week or month to help you control energy consumption, cut energy waste and potentially reduce energy bills.

In summary, the benefits of smart meters include:

- **SAVE ENERGY & MONEY**  
Consumers will be able to use the energy information and feedback from smart meters to help manage their "real time" energy usage and cut energy waste.
- **GREEN ENERGY**  
Smart meters are a key component in the development of the "smart grid," which will allow utilities to better accommodate renewable energy sources like solar and wind. Down the road, it's possible you may be able to sell excess energy

back to the utility—which is already happening in Ontario!

- **CUSTOMER SERVICE**  
Smart meters will help utilities reduce costs on everything from meter reading to being able to disconnect power if necessary from a distance and give you up-to-the minute details and quicker responses on power outages.

Both BC Hydro ([www.bchydro.com](http://www.bchydro.com)) and Fortis BC ([www.fortisbc.com](http://www.fortisbc.com)) have web pages devoted to helping you stay informed, learn about the technology and the benefits a more modernized smart grid offers. 🏠

**SCOOP** knows that smart meters have generated lots of discussion in some co-ops. This is one point of view; do you have another? Let us know your opinion at [scoop@chf.bc.ca](mailto:scoop@chf.bc.ca)

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