

## Smart meters coming soon to Delta

By Sandor Gyarmati, Delta Optimist July 7, 2011

Homeowners in Delta and throughout the province will soon have smart meters installed to record electricity use.

B.C. Hydro started the rollout of its \$930 million smart meter program this week that will see the old mechanical meters in homes and business replaced.

The digital meters capture and record the amount of power consumed or produced, transmitting that information to B.C. Hydro four to six times a day.

The goal is to have all the existing meters replaced before the end of 2012.

B.C. Hydro's contractor for the program is B.C.-based Corix Utilities, which has installed millions of meters for large and small utilities across North America.

According to B.C. Hydro, the program will pay for itself through reduced theft of electricity, energy savings and operating efficiencies, delivering \$1.6 billion in benefits over the next 20 years, in today's dollars. Since B.C. Hydro is publicly owned, all of those savings will benefit customers, according to the utility.

B.C. Hydro also says smart meters will create opportunities for customers and communities to sell power back to the grid from clean sources, such as solar panels, wind, biomass and geothermal generation.

As far as the possibility of a second tier rate for consumers that consume more electricity or consume power during peak periods, the utility says it will be maintaining the existing rate structure through the implementation period.

"Any future consideration of new time-of-use rate structures will include transparent public consultation, extensive research on whether there is any long-term need for time-of-use rates in British Columbia, and the independent regulatory review of the B.C. Utilities Commission," according to B.C. Hydro's website.

The Crown corporation adds the program will pay for itself without the need for mandatory time-of-use rates.

Chris Jordon, CEO of 1-888-burnt-out?, a Delta-based company specializing in electric sign and lighting retrofits, predicted there will be new rates down the road.

B.C. consumers with smart meters will be able to see a chart predicting when consumption will surpass the lower cost tier one electricity rate and shift to the more expensive tier two rate, he said in a company release.

Jordon noted avoiding some of the higher costs associated with the tier two rate is as easy as switching old lighting for new LED bulbs.

Earlier this year, Energy Minister Rich Coleman said he intended to conduct an in-depth review of B.C. Hydro, wanting it to provide justification in detail on its plans for the province's energy system. He especially singled out the smart metering program and a proposal to raise electricity rates 50 per cent over the next three years.

Last fall, New Democrat energy critic John Horgan predicted the smart meter program "is a disaster waiting to happen."

Horgan noted recent evidence from Ontario's smart meter program showed more than 80 per cent of people are actually paying more, not less, under time-of-use billing using smart meters.

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