Are smart meters really smart?

by ShopTexasElectricity

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Recently, Texas electric companies in Central Texas conducted side-by-side tests to confirm the accuracy of smart meters. These tests show that smart meters are indeed accurate compared to traditional analog meters, giving consumers more reliable information about their Texas electricity consumption and electricity rates.

As smart meters are being rolled out in various parts of the state, consumers in deregulated energy areas now have the power to choose electricity providers that will utilize smart meters for their services. Despite the negative publicity thrown against the use of smart meters from certain groups, this technology will pave the way for the future of electrical use not only in Texas and the United States, but in other parts of the world.

The â€œSmartâ€• In Smart Meters

Smart meters go beyond the basic task of metering and their relationship with electricity rates and consumption. The â€œsmartâ€• in smart meters involves the handling and processing of data, particularly in developing better ways of doing things related to energy use. Smart meters enable consumers to monitor and control their costs in real-time for air-conditioning, heat, utility water and even natural gas.

It can and will involve other complex processes that go beyond the capabilities of traditional analog meters such as: data systems, data infrastructure, data collection, advanced meter management systems, and interconnectivity with other â€œsmartâ€• appliances in the home. When people are more aware of their electricity consumption, they can bring their use under control thus help bring down harmful carbon emissions.

Issues and Challenges

In some areas in the United States such as in California, consumer groups filed a class action lawsuit against their utility company, contending that their electricity bills ballooned with their use of smart meters. Investigation into these complaints indicate that there were no real issues with the smart metersâ€™ performance nor were they responsible for the higher bills â€“ except the fact that the smart meters indicated a more accurate figure of usersâ€™ electricity consumption, as well as variations in electricity rates which are caused by external factors.

Another issue hurled against smart meters is the supposedly health risk posed by the use of wireless technologies in smart meters used in the transmission of relevant data from the unit to the processing base stations at utility company facilities. The World Health Organization however gave the conclusion that there are no scientific evidences that point to the adverse health effects supposedly caused by wireless technologies.

Market Outlook for Smart Meters

The market outlook for smart meters looks promising, not only in the United States but in other emerging market countries as well, according to reports from Northeast Group LLC. The report indicates that the market could hit the $49 billion level by the year 2020 as these countries continue to focus in developing intelligent electricity grid systems in an effort to conserve energy, support the use of renewable energy sources, and reduce the impact of carbon emissions with the use of electricity.

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