



May 11, 2014

NEWS

New AMI meters now being installed in Archuleta County

LPEA hopes to dispel rumors and exaggerated myths about the technology

DURANGO, Colo. – La Plata Electric Association (LPEA), in concert with most utilities across the country, is in the process of replacing its meters with newer, “smarter” meters as part of an Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system. Meters are now being deployed in Archuleta County.

“In short, AMI meters will help LPEA help you,” said Dan Harms, LPEA systems engineer. “The new meters are already proving beneficial, streamlining efficiencies, as well as enabling members with the new meters to monitor their energy usage via LPEA’s SmartHub at www.lpea.coop. But there’s been a great deal of erroneous information out there and we want our members to know the facts.”

Myth: Wireless technology is a health threat

LPEA’s AMI meters use wireless technology to communicate – a small, 0.3 watt, 900 MHz radio that communicates readings once or twice an hour. To put this in perspective, noted Harms, a person would have to stand next to an AMI meter continuously for more than a year to receive the equivalent exposure one gets from a 15 minute cell phone call.

The American Cancer Society states that “There is no clear evidence at this time that RF (radio frequency) waves from smart meters (or other devices) can cause harmful health effects.” (<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancercauses/othercarcinogens/athome/smart-meters>)

“The bottom line is,” said Ron Meier, LPEA manager of engineering, “if you are concerned about radio frequencies, those emitted by your cell or cordless phones, microwaves, and fluorescent lights far outweigh the RF of the AMI meter. I have young children, and I personally am looking forward to having the AMI meter installed at my house. I’m not at all worried about any ill health effects.”

Myth: Security threat with AMI

Security has also been cited as a concern with AMI. LPEA has a strict policy to maintain as confidential all members' personal information and data, and the data from the AMI system is no exception. LPEA's AMI system returns hourly energy and voltage readings, which are necessary to manage today's complex grid loading. With the recent influx of variable frequency drives, CFL lights, LED lights, and renewable generation, managing the distribution grid requires much more information than it did even five years ago, according to Harms.

"The AMI system does not return, nor does it have the ability to return, *what* the energy you used was for," said Harms. "Contrary to internet lore, LPEA does not know when you are watching your TV or doing laundry. LPEA also cannot control anything inside your home unless you request that we install a special control device to do so. A member may request this if they want to save money by opting into a program enabling LPEA to control the water heater or ETS heater.

Myth: Potential increase of fire/explosion

Some internet reports claim AMI meters increase the risk of fire and explosion, especially in homes with older wiring. All LPEA meters meet the safety requirements as outlined in the National Electric Safety Code.

"More than 1 million meters like the ones LPEA is deploying have been installed for many years across North America, with billions of hours of runtime, and not one fire," said Meier. "Electrical fires due to faulty wiring do occur, but they are no more likely to occur with an AMI meter than they are with any other electrical meter."

Benefit: Tools for monitoring electricity

As noted above, the AMI system sends hourly readings back to LPEA, information that LPEA members can view at www.lpea.coop by clicking on the SmartHub link, which requires a secure log-in.

SmartHub data allows members to make month-to-month comparisons and see how usage varies from day-to-day and hour-to-hour. This can help members understand their usage, and, ostensibly help reduce energy consumption. The information also helps LPEA Customer Service Representatives and Energy Management Advisors assist in troubleshooting abnormal usage.

Benefit: Rapid outage reporting

"Perhaps the biggest benefit you'll see with AMI is that the system immediately reports to LPEA when there is a loss of power at your meter," said Harms. "This helps our dispatch and

crews more quickly pinpoint where the outage has occurred, enabling us to get your power restored faster.”

Additional information on AMI meters is available at www.lpea.coop. LPEA does offer members the option to “opt out” of the AMI meter and retain the old, analog meter. The “opt out” is currently free, but likely LPEA will need to charge for the extra service of meter reading in the near future.

“The thing we want our members to remember is if you also choose to hit the internet and do some research of your own, do try to find professional, peer-reviewed journals,” added Meier. “Think twice about taking the opinion of one person with a blog.”

LPEA, celebrating 75 years in 2014, provides to its more than 30,000 members, with nearly 41,000 meters, safe, reliable electricity at the lowest reasonable cost, while being environmentally responsible. For additional information, contact LPEA at 970.247.5786 or visit www.lpea.coop.

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