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## **It Fries Your Brain and Reads Your Mind**

In the past few years, people have been getting very excited about electric meters. The reason? Electric utilities are replacing their manual meters, which have rotary numbers like the odometers in old cars, with smart meters that have built-in radios. The radios communicate with the electric companies,

most often over ZigBee-based mesh networks.

The technology's supporters include electric companies, meter makers and ZigBee radio manufacturers. The new devices save money for the utilities, which no longer have to pay meter readers to visit each customer's house. And the smart meter and ZigBee manufacturers get to sell stuff to the utilities.



Opponents include a worldwide quilt of consumer coalitions desperate to stop the use of electric meters. Google "smart meter" and you will find them quickly. Their major complaints revolve around issues of safety and privacy.

When it comes to safety, the concern is that smart meters emit radiation that can cause cancer. Professes one online commenter: "Smart meters transmit radiation every few seconds all day long, which adds up to hundreds of times more radiation exposure—even at many feet away—than that of cell phones. Children, pregnant women, seniors, people with immune deficiencies and people with medical implants are especially at risk. Also pets and plants."

The sources of this information are cited as the World Health Organization and the International Agency for Research on Cancer, which state that electromagnetic fields are a Class 2-B carcinogen. Now, Class 2-B means "limited evidence of carcinogenicity in humans and less than sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals." This means smart meters, which have not been specifically investigated, emit something that almost certainly does not cause cancer.

As for privacy, they claim: “The easily hacked RF data may fall into the hands of hackers who may be thieves or terrorists... In violation of your constitutional rights, police, government agencies and others will have access to your lifestyle data without the need for a warrant.” But in reality, the only data the meter sends is how much electricity the house uses—information that is publicly available on the side of every house with an old-fashioned meter.

The evidence against smart meters may be shaky, but the uproar is not surprising, given the use of an unfamiliar technology, the fact that nobody was given much choice about using it—some electric utilities even charge consumers who want to opt out of the program—and, most important, there is no discernible benefit for the homeowner. Who wants to be pressured to use a new technology that doesn’t do them any good?

The RFID industry has a lot to learn from how the electricity industry has—and has not—dealt with the protests. Before deploying any new technology near members of the public, make sure it benefits them as well as you. And give them a free choice. The few people who are truly concerned must be able to opt out instead of being pushed to spread fear, uncertainty and doubt online.

*Kevin Ashton was cofounder and executive director of the Auto-ID Center.*

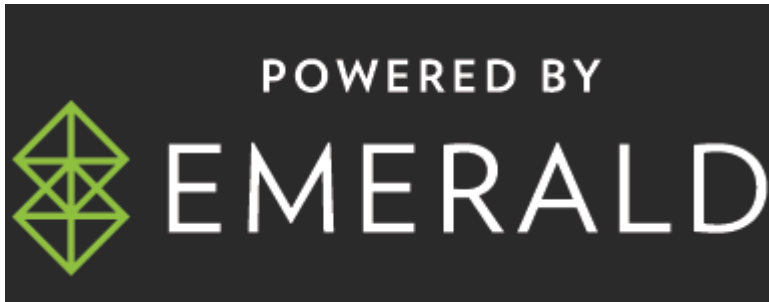


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