

http://www.marini.com/letters/ci_15020514



Wednesday Readers' Forum

Posted: 05/05/2010 12:08:59 AM PDT

Getting 'opt outs' back in

PG&E is not the only one breaking the rules.

I was called last week by someone from Marin Clean Energy, asking me if I was aware that I had "opted out" and if I knew what I was doing.

I know exactly what I am doing - trying to save myself from another government-created fiasco.

Since MCE called, trying to sell me electricity and I am on the state and federal "Do Not Call" lists, it would appear to be in violation of the telemarketing regulations of the Federal Trade Commission.

Kip Maly, WOODACRE

http://www.marinij.com/letters/ci_16061547



Monday Readers' Forum

Posted: 09/13/2010 12:10:30 AM PDT

Question its numbers

The glowing numbers of 80 percent ratepayer retention by the Marin Energy Authority cannot be trusted.

I opted out twice, by phone and by e-mail, but the authority snuck a Marin Clean Energy charge in my P&GE bill for August.

When confronted about this bogus charge, the authority told me to file a complaint with the state Public Utilities Commission.

Its representative said that I had opted out, but said the authority had already bought the energy and cannot refund the charge.

Marvin McDougal, MILL VALLEY

MARGO FORBES
DON FORBES
[REDACTED]
NOVATO, CA
94945
[REDACTED]

August 23, 2010
Marin Energy Authority
Dba Marin Clean Energy
3501 Civic Center Dr. Room 308
San Rafael, CA 94903

Attention: Dawn Weisz, Interim Director
dweisz@marinenergyauthority.org

Subject: Improper Billing

Dear Ms. Weisz,

This spring we received a letter informing of our right as county residents to opt out of Marin Clean Energy and stay with PG&E. We followed the instructions in the phone prompt and was advised that the recorded call had completed the necessary steps and we would receive a letter confirming our “opt out” shortly. No letter arrived. Then we received a second letter dated May 26, 2010 apologizing for the previous letter telling us that requests made after May 3 could not be honored.

We again opted out a second time on July 4, 2010 using the email option. Our most recent bill included a charge from Marin Clean Energy. We were informed that this was because we hadn’t opted out before the billing period.

Frankly we think this is totally unfair. We followed the PG&E instructions and were informed that the process was successful. We didn’t believe that the second letter applied to us until we started getting “welcome to Marin Clean Energy” postcards. We did not want to change our service. We don’t believe that automatically switching existing service represents the kind of image that you have tried to portray in the media. The error was internal between you and PG&E and we, as a consumers should not be penalized.

Dawn Weisz
August 23, 2010

We would appreciate having our Marin Clean Energy fees reversed from our most recent PG&E bill.

Account #: [REDACTED]

The favor of a reply would be deeply appreciated.

Yours truly,
Margo Forbes
Don Forbes

cc: Charles McClashan (cmGlashan@co.marin.ca.us)
Paul Clanon (pac@cpuc.ca.gov)

http://www.marinij.com/opinion/ci_17396726



Posted 02/16/2011 01:00:00 AM PST

Empowering politics

It is difficult to know where to start refuting this Charles McGlashan (Marin Voice, Feb. 13) and his socialistic programs, and desire to control many aspects in life in Marin, while telling us it is "good medicine to take."

Me thinks he "protests too much."

If the reports are correct that MEA has only four employees, then I guess the executive director could answer the phone herself, for that money.

It is McGlashan's desire, as a real politician, to sit on as many boards as possible and have his "puppets" installed so he continues to have sway over their activities, continue his means of being in the minority but getting his objects accomplished, even when he is out of office.

It took us multiple tries to get out of MEA, which took great pride in forcing everyone onto its ratepayer rolls unless they "opted out."

It took us nine months to "opt out."

The mayor of Oakland, with much greater responsibilities, and with a much larger payroll, is getting a self-imposed 25 percent cut in pay because of fiscal problems. Her total pay is far less money than McGlashan is paying MEA's executive director.

It appears he feels Marin has money and he regularly develops ways to get it for his pet projects.

I am certain there are hundreds of people in Marin who can do this job. If the opening had been publicly advertised and people were screened without prejudice, they probably would have found someone willing to work for considerable less money.

If McGlashan had taken out half-page color ads for this job opening, the line would have made a great picture for the front page of the IJ, with a story about the great number of advanced degrees, experienced people in Marin who are in the market for a job.

Leonard Malherbe, Mill Valley

http://www.marini.com/opinion/ci_20367666/marin-readers-forum-april-11



Marin Readers' Forum for April 11

From Marin Independent Journal readers

Posted: 04/11/2012

Not easy to 'opt out'

I received a letter from Marin Clean Energy on Saturday and tried to "opt out" on its Internet site.

The agency certainly does not make it easy. You have to do a search to find the opt-out form.

Apparently, I will be hearing from the agency again, either by e-mail or a phone call.

It feels like we are prisoners of this agency.

I do not know what the Novato City Council was thinking when it voted to roll Novato residents into this agency. The council has lost two votes in any future election.

Geri Butler, Novato

http://www.marinij.com/opinion/ci_20375700/marin-readers-forum-april-12



Marin Readers' Forum for April 12

From Marin Independent Journal readers

Posted: 04/12/2012 05:14:00 AM PDT

Opting out isn't easy

I was forced into the Marin Energy Authority program by the Ross Town Council and I just received my first notice that I am now a proud customer. Interestingly, on the MEA notice there is no account number provided.

If I want to "opt out," I have to submit my PG&E electric number, which is not my PG&E account number.

I do not know my PG&E electric number.

When I try and speak with someone at MEA, no one answers the phone. A woman spoke at the Ross Town Council meeting about the tricks MEA uses to make it difficult to opt out.

Clearly, she was correct.

Derek H. Webb, Sausalito

-----Original Message-----

From: Mike Arnold [mailto:arnold4@pacbell.net]

Sent: Thursday, April 12, 2012 9:48 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Marin Clean Energy

To all,

See the letter in today's IJ. My experience opting out was similar. The phone tree that they installed is annoying and -- if one is not careful -- you will not be opting out. As far as I could determine, it requires listening to their marketing pitch and "reconfirming" the opt-out choice. If one gets annoyed and hangs up before the second opt-out choice is made, it is not clear what happens.

Also, and probably one of the biggest financial issues is that MEA is "betting" implicitly against the fall in future NG prices. Given another story in today's paper regarding the oversupply of NG and the coming price declines, MEA customers over time could be faced with prices sufficiently higher than PG&E's that former MEA customers will begin to opt out. MEA says they will incur small penalties. But that is only true if a few opt out.

If a sufficient number of customers do opt out after opting in due to prices above PG&E's prices, what is MEA going to do with the extra energy? (They would have to sell it back at a loss or raise prices further to existing customers.) In economics, they are creating a "stampede" game, which if events come to pass, look out, because there will be a rush to the exits.

When I posed this question to MEA staff, they didn't understand the question, despite having a consultant's report in 2010 coming to the same conclusion. This was reported in the IJ in 2010 and is provided below.

And that's why I opted out. They are gambling with taxpayers' money, because if NG prices continue to fall and the spread between PG&E and MEA widens inducing customers to opt-out after (passively) being opted in, who is going to bail out MEA?

-- Mike

Editorial: Marin power choice should be clear and public friendly

Marin Independent Journal Editorial

Posted: 04/15/2012 05:00:00 AM PDT

WHEN THE MARIN Energy Authority was taking shape, there was criticism that ratepayers were being automatically switched from PG&E to the fledgling public power agency without a vote...

Reader comments to Marin IJ editorial:

Comment



Dave Green · San Rafael, California

I use to joke, "opt-out early, opt-out often" from the silly MEA. Turns out to be good advice. I have yet to hear from MEA after filling out the modestly confusing online form (phone number didn't even ring-surprise!). So I will have to opt-out again. I know it's pointless to make the case against MEA as the true believers are beyond hope.

Reply ·  1 · Like · 5 hours ago



Edmond McGill ·  Top Commenter · University of San Francisco

I had the same experinece. Wouldn't it have been cheaper and esaier to sell indulgences to those who feel guilty for using energy. The guilty could be forgiven and then we could donate the indulgences fees to the fission ignition project at Lawrence Livermore.
www.edmondmcgill.com

Reply · Like · 4 hours ago

4/17/12

To: MCE

This is to notify those imposing (un?) Clean Energy on Madin - this family wants no part of this scheme.

We opt out. Electric service ID #2572801005.

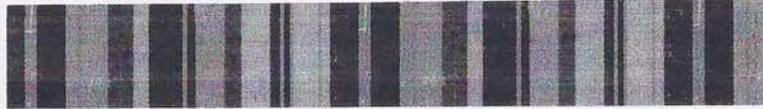
The opt out process is very cumbersome.

Endless waiting, automated voice mail & a real person in another city or state discourage all but the most persistent.

B. Atchison



10000
Kentfield, CA
94901



April 17, 2012

TO MCE

I HAVE TRIED TO REACH YOU
TO OPT OUT BUT I WAS
UNSUCCESSFUL. NO ONE ANSWERS
THE NUMEROUS PHONE CALLS I MAKE
AND IT'S OBVIOUS THAT YOU DON'T
INTEND TO.

I WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO DICTATE
WHAT KIND OF ENERGY I CHOOSE
AND MY ULTIMATE DECISION
IS NONE OF YOUR CONCERN.
HOWEVER, CONSIDERING YOUR
THREATENING NOTICE I RECEIVED IN
THE MAIL -

I AM GOING ON RECORD THAT
I AM OPTING OUT OF MCE

Viggo van Esp
[REDACTED] DRIVE

KENTFIELD

ELECTRIC
PG&E ACCOUNT NUMBER
[REDACTED]

http://www.marinij.com/opinion/ci_20419074/marin-readers-forum-april-18



Marin Readers' Forum for April 18

From Marin Independent Journal readers

Posted: 04/18/2012 05:35:00 AM PDT

MEA's difficult 'opt out'

→ Has anyone else tried to "opt out" of Marin Clean Energy? You can't.

Call the phone listed in its letter, put in your Service ID number and the number can't be found.

Try going to its website's "Opt Out" section, enter your PG&E account number and that number can't be found, but you will be redirected to fill out a form that requests the same info as above, plus your name, address, phone number and e-mail address.

If you don't include any one of these, your opt-out will not be accepted. Include all of them, and the system says the "Server is down, try again later."

So, I guess we are all now permanently enrolled, like it or not.

Funny thing, I thought we got to choose.

J. Harmon, San Rafael



Marin Clean Energy: Harrumph

The Business of Business

Published: Wednesday, April 18, 2012 12:18 PM PDT

Al Coddington

Question: I received a piece of junk mail and when I opened it, to my surprise, it was a notice from Marin Clean Energy stating I could now opt out of their extra cost electricity program, for free. I phoned them to opt out, but wasn't able to make the automated answering system work.

Second question: I have solar panels on my commercial building. I phoned Marin Clean Energy and asked what effect using their services would have on my electricity costs. They were unable to answer my question.

Third question: I phoned Marin Clean Energy and asked what opting in would cost. They were unable to tell me. Why aren't these people straightforward and transparent?

Answer: I have received more complaints about Marin Clean Energy than I have about anything else in recent memory. The above three are typical. Being a fair-minded journalist, I phoned MCE to ask for their side of the story. I did this on several days, several times a day, and the phone just rang and rang and rang. No human being ever answered it. So if you actually talked to someone there, you did better than I. I think it would be fair to say, they have a problem.

Most of the areas of Marin are automatically, "opted in" Marin Clean Energy. MCE is a quasi governmental or possibly nonprofit company. It is proud of the fact that, unlike PG&E, it has no shareholders to control it. They are not regulated by the State of California Public Utilities Commission. They are regulated by a committee of locally elected officials in Marin County. If you do nothing at all, your electricity bill will increase. In the letter, they claim that, in return, they will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by ensuring that 50 percent of the power you buy from them, for more money than PG&E, will not produce greenhouse gas emissions. On its web page PG&E states, (Press Release: March 1, 2012) "PG&E gets more than half of its electricity from sources that are carbon-free or renewable."

You can also, "opt out" by not paying the MCE extra charge on your PG&E bill, but MCE will fine you one time \$5.

Contact Al at Al@Coddingtonconsulting.com



Marin Readers' Forum for April 19

From Marin Independent Journal readers

Posted: 04/19/2012 05:09:00 AM PDT

MEA's 'stacked deck'

As regards the April 15 IJ editorial about the Marin Energy Authority, I don't think that MEA is giving ratepayers a fair chance at "voting" to participate in their green energy program.

By using an opt-out procedure, it appears that MEA is using a stacked deck, knowing that many people will not take the trouble to read its lengthy letter or go through the difficult process of opting out.

MEA likely will achieve a high participation rate which is really not a true measure of approval of the program or desire to cooperate. Many of the program participants will not even know they are being automatically transferred to MEA's Marin Clean Energy program.

After trying three or four times to reach MEA to opt-out, I never was able to reach a live person to ask questions. I wanted to know if the its rates were the same as PG&E's rates. Its system for allowing a person to hold on the line was either broken or set up improperly because it broke the connection after a couple of minutes.

I tried over several days and always had the same result.

I had to settle for using its automated phone input system, which was quite frustrating. I had to terminate the first call while I searched through my PG&E bills to find my electric account number. Why didn't MEA put that information in its letter or at least state that the caller should have this handy before calling?

Many people object to MEA's using an opt-out procedure and not allowing them to make their own decision based on the merits of the program, before they are automatically enrolled. The MEA's marketing method seems dishonest and gives citizens another reason to distrust government programs.

Can you imagine if Amazon sent a letter telling people they were automatically enrolled in a book of the month program and would receive a book each month, and an invoice and this would continue unless and until the person wrote them to opt-out?

Amazon would face numerous lawsuits if they used such an underhanded marketing technique.

Art Faibisch,
San Rafael



Marin Readers' Forum for April 21

From Marin Independent Journal readers

Posted: 04/21/2012 05:29:00 AM PDT

Power to grow

I just received a letter from Marin Clean Energy. It sort of looks like junk mail because Marin's newest bureaucracy, in part, changed its public name to Marin Clean Energy from Marin Energy Authority, which is still the legal entity and the organization many of us opposed (including the grand jury) last year.

I almost threw it out because we get lots of mail from solar companies, and I thought I had already "opted out" of the MEA. Apparently not.

So, this letter notifies us (and you) that we can opt out should we so choose. However, the letter does not say anything about its rates being higher than PG&E; it just refers you to its web site. Its confusing array of rate plans makes any cost comparison almost impossible, which I am sure it is counting on.

So then I go on its website to opt out, and of course there are a number of steps to go through to do so.

It's not that easy. Again, that's its intent.

I have spoken with numerous Marin friends who have no knowledge of Marin Clean Energy, or don't associate it with the Marin Energy Authority controversy last year. So, they will probably just get swept up in this higher cost "green energy" program.

But if you really believe that Marin Clean Energy's contract with Shell Energy North America is supplying green electrons to your house, and that MEA will indeed help save the planet, and it makes you feel good, then I encourage you to discard the letter.

And by doing so you will also be helping to grow the MEA which is now up to 10 employees while PG&E does all the distribution, billing, repairs, and capital improvements. What exactly do these public servants do anyway?

Trip Ames, Tiburon



Marin Readers' Forum for April 25

From Marin Independent Journal readers

Posted: 04/25/2012 06:15:00 AM PDT

Re-opting out?

I opted out of Marin Clean Energy twice. Once, when my power grid block came up for being "in," and again a couple weeks ago when I received the letter telling me I was "in" unless I took action to opt out — again.

Choosing to opt out by phone (I wanted an opportunity to tell a real person what I thought of this bureaucratic boondoggle), I faced a convoluted voice mail system with multiple steps required for opting out. At each hurdle, I was forced to listen to yet another sales pitch for Marin Clean Energy.

By the time I was finished with this process, opt out confirmation number in hand, I phoned yet another number and managed to talk to a real, live person. The unlucky lady who answered my call got an earful of my not-so-nice thoughts on MCE and its three-card monte scam. Marin Clean Energy burdens Marin taxpayers for another unnecessary bureaucracy that produces nothing other than high-paying jobs for political cronies. The few solar panels on my home's roof produce more kilowatt hours of energy to the grid than does MCE.

The debt burden shouldered by Marin taxpayers does not finance production of additional energy. Nor does it modernize transmission lines, or improve grid stability in times of heavy usage. If these funds were utilized to install solar panels on public buildings, or provide no- or low-interest loans to businesses and homeowners so that solar panels could be installed to produce additional power, I would not have opted out.

The parable of the "Emperor's New Clothes" seems applicable to this agency. Only this time, the emperor is not only naked, we are the ones paying for his wardrobe.

Janis M. Bosenko, Mill Valley



Letters to the editor

Published: Wednesday, April 25, 2012 1:06 PM PDT

Marin Clean Energy

Regarding Al Coddington's column of April 18, 2012, about the difficulties of Marin Clean Energy: I did much the same as Coddington **after about two hours of research.** **What a scam!**

I was, however, able to **opt out at their website after navigating to several web pages.** Your column is exactly the kind of public attention this needs.

Anthony Bentivegna
Novato



Marin Readers' Forum for April 25

From Marin Independent Journal readers

Posted: 04/25/2012 06:15:00 AM PDT

'Manufactured consent'

If I hadn't been somewhat informed regarding Marin Clean Energy tactics, I could have easily tossed its letter into the recycling basket, thinking it was junk mail. If I had, I would have continued to be "opted out" of PG&E, which should not have been done without my permission in the first place.

Why wasn't there a bold message printed on the envelope about opting out?

Pressure needs to be put on MCE to be clear about its confusing opt-out process. We customers, especially seniors or someone with English as a second language, should never be put through the ordeal of "manufactured consent" that Noam Chomsky talks about.

To properly protect energy customers, a judge or public consumer protection attorney should spell out, on the front page of the IJ, the legal procedures MCE must follow for the opt out process.

This power authority has evaded legal affirmation.

If this kind of behavior is allowed to continue in this county, we'll be teetering on the verge of complete dissolution of representative government.

Alezz Laielen, San Rafael

http://www.marinij.com/opinion/ci_20517096/marin-voice-marin-clean-energy-choice-is-yours



Marin Voice: Marin Clean Energy -- the choice is yours

By Damon Connolly and Kathrin Sears
Guest op-ed column

Posted: 05/01/2012 05:54:00 AM PDT

TWO YEARS AGO, the Marin Energy Authority "flipped the switch" and began serving about 7,000 Marin customers, putting an unprecedented percentage of "green electrons" on the California grid on behalf of our customers. ...

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Warren Carreiro · Real Estate Broker at Frank Howard Allen

Opting out of Marin Clean Energy is no easy task. It is similar in difficulty to filling out a rebate card where the field for the required numbers is way too small and the paper is high gloss so no pin will write on it.

For example, it wants your account number which is not the usual number people use when dealing with PG&E. Not only that, but it does not want the last few digits of the account so if you enter the full number you get an error. Also, the final step is a "confirm" button that is not highlighted and not visible unless you scroll down the page.

Not only are they requiring you opt out but are making to process hard enough to do with the hope that you will give up and stay.

Reply · Like · 2 hours ago

http://www.marini.com/opinion/ci_20569318/marin-readers-forum-may-8



Marin Readers' Forum for May 8

From Marin Independent Journal readers

Posted: 05/08/2012 06:14:00 AM PDT

Power to 'opt out'

Beware, be very aware, that your government is doing things you may not be aware of.

We, like a lot of other citizens of Marin probably "tossed" the junk mail look-alike piece we got about "opting out" of the Marin Energy Authority scam.

We went online and found it quite easy to opt-out. However, about two weeks later we received a confirmation letter in the mail with a "we are sorry to see you go ..." line and the very alarming notice that we will be billed by MEA for April through May and cannot be switched "back" to PG&E until the following billing period.

Are you kidding me?

I never wanted any part of this ridiculous and redundant new level of bureaucracy.

I chose to "opt out" over a year ago, only to be told I couldn't at the time.

The Board of Supervisors should do what it was elected to do and let go of the "feel good" nonsense, like this, plastic bag bans, trains to nowhere and developmental roadblocks making projects like the Lucas/Grady Ranch near impossible to accomplish.

James Selfridge, San Anselmo



Letters to the editor

Published: Wednesday, May 9, 2012 1:51 PM PDT

Marin Clean Energy

Marin Clean Energy is not playing fair! When its notice was received recently, per instructions I called 632-3674 six times (with and without the prefix 1) and received either the message "This number is no longer available" or nothing and then silence. And so I unhappily called two Marin County supervisors and finally reached "Dane," MCE's representative at Novato City Hall, who returned my call and said he was able to get through to the 888 number.

I then called "Ashley" at MCE, who asked for my PG&E account number. Another problem. Since the bill was recently paid and tossed I had to search the recycle bin, find it and scotch tape it so that I could read the numbers. Her question about why I was opting out didn't deserve an answer. It was my choice, period. A confirmation number was given and that was that.

But then checking their online option to see how well that worked I ran into the PG&E account number again and was thoroughly confused by their highlighting. MCE already has the unfair benefit of the default granted by Assembly Bill 117 and here I spent more than an hour of my time on this procedure. It made me doubly sure that I made the right decision to opt out.

Dorothy Thomas
Novato



Marin Clean Energy's 'opt-out'

Musing on Marin

Published: Wednesday, May 9, 2012 1:51 PM PDT

Paul S. Mamalakis

The worst fears of Marin Clean Energy's critics may have come to pass. They claim MCE has made the opt-out process so onerous that most current Pacific Gas & Electric customers will just throw in the towel.

California's Community Choice Aggregation program enabled Marin to form a Joint Powers Authority, about four years ago. Member cities could authorize the JPA, Marin Energy Authority, to negotiate contracts with green-energy providers to cut down on the county's greenhouse gas emissions. PG&E would still deliver the power to homes and businesses, maintain the system and handle the billing of customers.

Once a city joined the authority, ratepayers automatically became part of the plan, unless they decided to go through the formal process of opting-out. Frustrated Novatans are faulting Councilwoman Madeline Kellner for forcing them to undergo this ordeal.

In February 2009, Kellner made a motion to oppose joining the Marin Energy Authority. Councilwoman Jeanne MacLeamy supported her motion, expressing a lack of confidence in Marin's ability to operate a power authority and warned the undertaking posed great financial risk. Providing the third vote, Councilwoman Pat Eklund argued, "In going through this business plan, there are so many uncertainties, and the governance is probably my biggest concern."

Last year Kellner ran for re-election. After taking heat from neighborhood coalitions opposed to high-density housing, she began openly courting environmental groups. Kellner singlehandedly revived the debate about Novato becoming part of the Marin Energy Authority, convincing her colleagues to spend up to \$10,000 for a consultant to advise the panel. In a stunning turnabout, she gave short shrift to the risks identified by the experts and voted with Councilwomen Denise Athas and Carole Dillon-Knutson to join the MEA.

Defending her perceived flip-flop, Kellner said, "Two years ago, I did not vote for joining MEA because the city was facing fiscal challenges and it was unclear at the time what the financial risks might be to the city to join, and the program was yet untested. I thought it best to hold off considering joining until our unanswered questions were answered and after we saw how successful MEA would be getting off the ground."

http://marinscope.com/articles/2012/04/20/novato_advance/news/business/doc4f8f1357b9d88012881434.txt

Jamie Tuckey, MCE's Communications Director, told me that in mid-April just over 100,000 letters were sent to customers in Marin County who had not yet been offered service through Marin Clean Energy. For those desiring to continue receiving generation service from PG&E, the letter described two methods of opting-out.

"Our call center has been taking between 400-1,000 calls per day. We are also responding to many email inquiries and customers visiting our local office here in San Rafael to opt-out with our Account Manager or to ask questions," she related. "Due to the difficulties that customers have experienced with our automated phone service, we have modified our system, so that if a customer selects the option to opt-out, they will be transferred to a customer service representative who can help process this request."

If MCE's labyrinthine process isn't "a diabolical plot" to prevent customers from sticking with PG&E, then the organization's opt-out assumptions were seriously flawed. Either way, Councilwoman Kellner's job-approval ratings are taking a bruising.

Paul Mamalakis is a political columnist for Marinscope Community Newspapers. He can be reached at 892-7361.



Marin Readers' Forum for Oct. 6

From Marin Independent Journal readers

Posted: 10/06/2012 05:59:00 AM PDT

ENERGY

Unfairly charged

How many Marin residents have been slammed into the Marin Clean Energy program?

The agency claims it spent me a letter that I never received. They said there would be no termination fee for a program I never signed up for.

Then they robbed me when they would not reverse the charges for the current bill.

Slammed and robbed by a group that is disguised as providing clean energy. Sign me up for the class action suit.

Mark Stevens, Larkspur



Marin Readers' Forum for Oct. 9

From Marin Independent Journal readers
Posted: 10/09/2012 06:15:00 AM PDT

Clean Energy billing

I read the Oct. 6 letter from Mark Stevens with great interest since I have been having the same troubles with the Marin Clean Energy program, after it charged my patient, who exists on a meager \$854 a month in disability benefits, with a monthly charge of \$19.95 — without any prior notice.

Upon making a telephone call to PG&E, I was given a number for the Marin Clean Energy.

After being asked to remove her from this costly program, MCE's worker said she could not get any refunds for the previous or the current month's bill, but that the next bill would reflect no charges from the county power authority.

Even though I made this call about two months ago, the new bill just arrived and it still had the \$19.95 unauthorized charge. Both PG&E and MCE told me there had, somehow, been an error, but that there is no recourse for any refunds for any current or previous charges.

Don't get me wrong, I am all in favor of renewable and clean energy, but I strongly object to the financing of this on the backs those who have the least income and resources.

To most folks, \$20 a month isn't much, but when you have a very small income on which to survive, \$20 might easily be the difference between buying medication, eating or paying this bill (under threat of losing electricity service).

There needs to be a forum for those customers least able to pay this "surcharge" to offer them some recourse resulting in a reversal of any further unauthorized charges — in particular those on a low-income "Lifeline" rates."

In closing, I would like to point out that the electricity usage bill was less than \$7 and the gas usage less than \$20; however, the total bill was nearly \$40.

William L. O'Donnell, Novato

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/03/14/EDJD119GLV.DTL>



SmartMeters should be customers' choice

Monday, March 14, 2011



Bowing to public pressure and common sense, California's top utility regulator finally told Pacific Gas & Electric Co. that it must offer customers an opportunity to opt out of receiving the company's wireless SmartMeters. The announcement comes after PG&E has replaced 74 percent of its analog electrical meters and 83 percent of its gas meters.

Better late than never.

Opponents of SmartMeters have found all kinds of reasons to dislike them. Some believe that the wireless meters, which emit radiation, are responsible for present or future health problems. Some are convinced that their bills inexplicably shot up after PG&E installed a SmartMeter. Some were concerned about their privacy, since the meters can reveal when people aren't home.

Few if any of PG&E's customers appreciated the fact that they had no choice but to accept these new meters.

PG&E is a monopoly in most of Northern California, and it refused to allow customers to say no to the new meters. It was a classic example of limited consumer choice - and the California Public Utilities Commission should have stepped in long ago.

Now PG&E has two weeks to propose a solution that allows customers to opt out. Fine - there are options.

Ideally, the company would allow customers to keep their old meters. Digital meters that transmit data over wires or fiber-optic cables should also be an option - they were for PG&E, when it was choosing which new technology to install.

Either way, PG&E shouldn't use this as an excuse to gouge customers who choose to opt out. The PUC simply said that the opt-out options must have a "reasonable" cost to the customer. But what's a "reasonable" cost, and why should the customer have to pay for it? How would it work with customers who already have SmartMeters installed but don't want them?

There are still lots of questions out there, and we look forward to hearing answers. But this is a long-overdue step in the right direction. **Customer choice should have been an opt-in all along.**

Read more: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/03/13/EDJD119GLV.DTL#ixzz1Gbf5MzHj>