

'Smart' Meters Spying On You? Rockland Electric Company Says They Don't But Secondary Spies Do Use Them To Spy On You

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GREAT PLAINS, N.Y. (CBSNewYork) — There are new privacy concerns over a device that tracks how much power you use in your house.

Some experts say smart meters could reveal more than what you want known about what goes on inside your home, CBS2's Clark Fouraker reported on Tuesday.

About 2,700 homes near Mahwah, New Jersey have the state's first smart power meters — the latest gadget used by utilities to track how often the lights are on.

"The smart meter is essentially a mini computer, if you will," Rockland Electric Company's Keith Scerbo said.

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Unlike the meter on most homes, smart meters send data from your home back to the power company every 15 minutes. Utilities don't just learn how much power you use; they can also be alerted in real-time to an outage caused by bad weather.

The smart meter's ability to talk back to the utility has some people concerned information about their lifestyle and habits at home could fall into the wrong hands, CBS2's Fouraker reported.

"We will not be able to understand or tell what appliances are being used within the home, how much each appliance has consumed, as far as energy goes," Scerbo said.

Rockland Electric is a subsidiary of Orange and Rockland, and says this is good. Consumer groups, however, disagree.

"I don't know what their capabilities are. We do know smart meters produce data that has enough granularity that experts are able to go in and tell what kind of appliances people are using," said Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst for the American Civil Liberties Union.

Despite concerns of groups like the ACLU, the utility said it built cyber security into the meters and the software that runs them. But information is still being gleaned.

“They’re building a profile on the consumer, not only their usage, but the time of day,” said David Klein, managing partner of Klein Moynihan Turco LLP.

Rockland Electric said its privacy policy prohibits building consumer profiles or the selling of customers’ data.

New Jersey Assemblyman Ronald Dance has sponsored legislation that would force utilities to reveal what type of data they keep and which third parties would have access to it.