

## For small group of consumers, FPL's smart meters a dumb idea

Written by Wayne T. Price FLORIDA TODAY

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Nonnie Chrystal FP&L

**Nonnie Chrystal and her husband, Mark Baker, of Indialantic have 'no trespassing' signs in their yard and locks on their electric meter to stop FPL from installing a smart meter. They have the old style analog mechanical meter and are warning people of the health dangers of the new meters. / MALCOLM DENEMARK/FLORIDA TODAY**

Nonnie Chrystal of Indialantic has the air of a flower child about her. But she is no shrinking violet.

Last week, she addressed Brevard County commissioners and demanded they remove fluoride from the drinking water.

Just before her address to commissioners, I spoke with her about another subject that is stirring her passion these days.

That is Florida Power & Light, which has spent close to \$1 billion during the past five years making sure most of its customers have “smart meters” — digital devices that replace the analog boxes that measure energy usage.

FPL loves them. Many homeowners love them.

And the Public Service Commission also loves them and pretty much gave FPL the OK to charge those who don't want them a one-time fee of \$95 and then another \$13 each month to keep the analog meters.

Chrystal despises smart meters, holding them right up there with fluoridated water. She and a small number of others across the globe believe smart meters expose people and animals to electromagnetic fields and radio frequencies that can lead to illness or even death.

Chrystal cites, by heart, Florida statutes which she says proves the illegality of what FPL is doing with its smart meters. She and her husband have placed four padlocks on her analog meter and posted notices warning FPL meter readers against trespassing on their properties without proper advance notice.

“They will NOT be placing a smart meter on my home,” Chrystal said with a tone of conviction that kind of makes you want to take a step backward. (If anyone remembers those popular Chiffon margarine commercials from the 1970s — “It's not nice to fool Mother Nature” — you understand the tone I'm talking about.)

“They're trying to force me to pay to not be killed,” Chrystal said, adding she is on a campaign to remove smart meters throughout Florida. She doesn't sound like she's going to pony up enrollment or monthly fees to keep her analog meter.

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I started looking into FPL's smart meters because of Bright House Networks, which has been sending out notices to its customers that it's going all digital and starting in April, all TVs in your home will need "some type of digital device" to receive the digital signal. Bright House is providing customers with two free adapters and two remote controls until next January. After that, there will be a fee, an amount which Bright House doesn't disclose.

That's a story for later but it got me to thinking about how more digital devices are retrofitting our households and the way we live.

And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Sure, I'm probably one of the 'sheeple' Chrystal is talking about, at least when it comes to FPL's smart meter. But I think it's a cool service and it makes me think more about my energy usage each day, instead of on a monthly basis on FPL's "energy dashboard." The theory is kind of like McDonald's posting the calories on a Big Mac. You'll be so horrified that you'll consume less.

After speaking with Chrystal last week, I then had a telephone interview with David McDermitt, a senior spokesman for FPL. I mentioned Chrystal's allegations — and McDermitt has heard them all before in various forms — and though I couldn't see him, I could only imagine he was at his desk rubbing his temples. Chrystal, and others like her, "represent less than one half of one percent of our customers," he said.

Here are a few points McDermitt thought important:

- FPL has installed 4.5 million smart meters throughout its 35-county service area.
- The meters are vital to a modern electric grid.
- In addition to 4.5 million smart meters, the program includes the installation of more than 10,000 intelligent devices on FPL's electric grid and enhanced digital technology at nearly 600 power substations.
- In Brevard County, approximately 300,000 smart meters have been installed. About 4,000 people in Brevard have opted to keep their analog meters.
- Smart meters work with other components on the electric grid to help prevent many power outages and enable faster restoration of service to customers when outages occur.

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I asked him about the safety issues of the radio waves from the smart meters and he directed me to an FPL fact sheet, which reads:

“The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) sets limits on the maximum permissible exposure for emissions of RF-emitting devices. These limits are well below the point at which known biological impacts occur, and the smart meters being installed by FPL operate at levels that are hundreds of times lower than the FCC limit. No credible peer-reviewed studies have substantiated claims that smart meters cause health problems.”

How about the monthly charge to keep an analog meter?

“Over 99.5 percent of FPL’s customers have smart meters,” McDermitt said. “It would be unfair to ask the vast majority of our customers to subsidize the very small percentage who want an alternative meter.”

What does he say to people like Chrystal? (And I don’t mean that as a pejorative. It’s also good to some extent to have people like Chrystal challenging convention.)

“While we understand and appreciate that some folks don’t want a smart meter, we disagree with their views on that,” McDermitt said. “We’re happy to provide them with another option, which is our non-standard meter option.”

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