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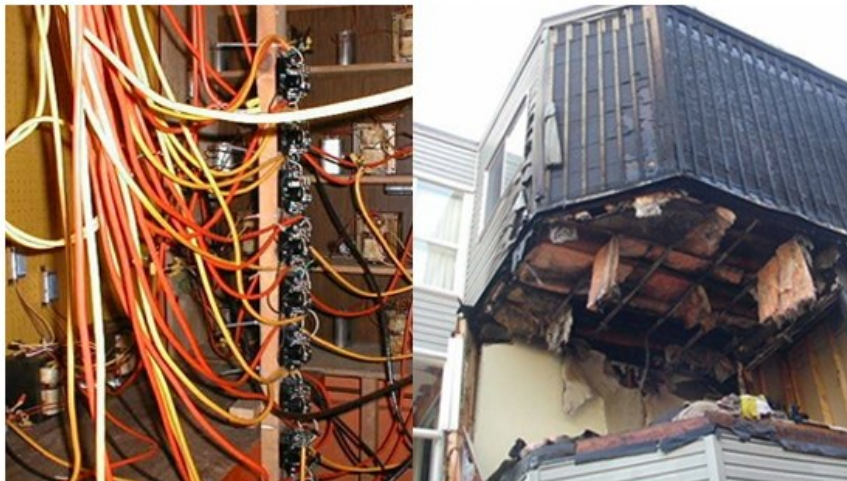
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May 3, 2011

### Smart meters help reduce electricity theft, increase safety



Late one night in 2004, a Surrey resident heading home from work noticed smoke rising from a house near Bear Creek Park. Even in the dark, he could tell that the structure was on fire.

When firefighters arrived at the scene, however, they weren't able to get close to the blaze because the ground around the house was energized by some power lines.

The flames lit up the night while BC Hydro crews worked to cut the power so that Surrey firefighters could get to work.

After the fire was extinguished, investigators discovered that the house was the site of a marijuana grow-op. Electricity needed for the operation was being illegally drawn directly from live wires. The neighbours had no idea that the nearby power lines had been tampered with by the criminals.

#### Electricity theft a dangerous affair

Len Garis, Fire Chief for Surrey, says that a house with a grow-op is much more likely to catch fire. That increased risk also affects family homes and businesses surrounding the grow-op.

Illegal diversions to power lines are becoming increasingly daring and significantly more dangerous. In Surrey, for example, about 50 percent of marijuana grow-ops inspected by the Surrey Fire Department had tapped into BC Hydro power lines. In addition to the fire hazard, exposed live wires in more public environments increases the risk of electrocution. These dangers are not just a problem for BC Hydro field crews and emergency first responders; they are a concern for everyone living in the community.

#### The cost of electricity theft

Electricity theft is a serious safety issue. It is also a financial issue with legitimate BC Hydro customers – you and me – paying for the power that is stolen. And it's not a small amount. Electricity theft costs us approximately \$100 million every year in energy costs – that's enough power to supply 77,000 homes for a year.

Part of the problem is that BC Hydro's existing system is unable to accurately detect whether electricity is being stolen. But smart meters and new distribution system meters (different from those installed at homes or businesses) provide the necessary technology to help combat this burden to our electricity system.

First of all, smart meters have a tamper detection feature that automatically notifies BC Hydro if they have been removed from the wall or otherwise manipulated.

Secondly, new distribution system meters located at key points on BC Hydro's system will measure electricity supplied to specific areas. Combined with software tools to enable electricity balancing analysis, distribution system meters will help BC Hydro identify electricity theft more accurately and address it more quickly.

Garis says the smart meters will become a strong preventative tool. "Those parties who are stealing power will be better identified," he says. "Overall, smart meters will help to make homes and communities safer."

#### Related links:

- [Straight facts about BC Hydro's smart metering program](#)
- [Smart metering program](#)
- [Smart metering program FAQ](#)

- Smart metering program / AQ
- Power is lost in BC Hydro's grid, but smart meters will help
- Smart meters essential to modernizing BC Hydro's grid

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