

NV Energy customers allowed to keep old-style meters

By Eli Segall, Las Vegas Sun

Facing pressure from state officials and customers, NV Energy will let ratepayers continue using old-style meters instead of switching to new digital ones.

The power company, which serves about 90 percent of Nevada's population, said Wednesday it will offer an analog meter to customers who do not want a digital "smart meter," which transmits power-usage data from a home or business directly to the utility.

Customers critical of smart meters have said they would rather keep their existing analog reader. But under NV Energy's plan, those meters will be replaced with "refurbished" ones to ensure that all company readers meet industry standards for accuracy, the utility said.

NV Energy is advising customers not to call to schedule an installation, as the company must still file more paperwork with the state Public Utilities Commission. Once approved, the company said, it will contact people who have said they do not want a smart meter and set up an appointment for the new analog one.

The PUC has estimated that 4,500 consumers in Clark County and 3,000 in Northern Nevada do not want a smart meter.

NV Energy's announcement came hours after the PUC voted 2-1 to give NV Energy more discretion in choosing an alternative meter, leaving open the possibility that customers could keep their current analog readers. In his dissent, Commissioner David Noble said the analog meters are inadequate and run slower with age.

The commission on Wednesday also OK'd lowering customers' installation costs of an alternative meter to \$52 from the previously approved \$107.

At the hearing, Commission Chairman Alaina Burtenshaw said there was a "good indication" that dissatisfied customers wanted to keep their analog readers or make the company replace the smart meters with analogs.

"This is a win for the people," Dan Jacobsen, technical staff manager for the state Bureau of Consumer Protection, said of the vote. "The commission gave them what they wanted."

Las Vegas-based NV Energy plans to replace all 1.35 million of its analog meters with digital ones. Some 1.22 million smart meters had been installed statewide as of late November.

Nevadans have complained, with little proof, that smart meters can cause hair loss, insomnia, birth defects, DNA damage, brain-wave alteration and terrorist attacks.

An Energy Department report said many companies had not done enough to protect smart meters from hackers. Also, a branch of the World Health Organization in 2011 reportedly called radio-frequency radiation from cellphones, utility meters and other devices a "possible carcinogen."