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SmartMeters, Energy Savings, Rebates, and More PG&E Gives Tips to Neighbors InDeed

BY DOUG BROWN

At a recent Neighbors InDeed “All Hands” workshop, we were given some excellent advice by PG&E. Here’s what we learned.

SMART METERS

All Lincoln Hills homes are now equipped with SmartMeters, which can be found on your electric and gas meters, by the side of your house (see photos). Just how smart is a SmartMeter? About 99.7%, according to PG&E Customer Service Representative Denise Lee, citing a report by the California Public Utilities Commission just released in September of this year. Some of the complaints that have hit the news media stem from coincidental heat waves and/or the inaccuracy of the previous analog meters.

How does all this work? SmartMeters transmit data electronically, via a cellular network, from your house to PG&E through nearby data collector units mounted on street lights or telephone poles. Information is of course encrypted to deter hackers. With this digital technology, accuracy is extremely high.

And more good news. With your SmartMeter you can track exactly how much gas and electricity you’re using every day AND every hour! Go to www.pge.com/myaccount, sign up with your PG&E account number and then go to “Usage” and then “Usage History.” You’ll be able to see, in the form of bar graphs, day-by-day or hour-by-hour energy use. “It’s an excellent way to determine exactly when and how much power you’re using,” said Denise.

For more information on the SmartMeter program, visit www.pge.com/smartmeter

SmartMeters are different from “SmartAC” devices that you may have had installed on your outside air conditioning unit – in exchange for which you received a \$25 credit on your account. SmartAC is a remotely activated device that will, in the case of an energy supply emergency (such as a 105° afternoon when the electric grid is overtaxed in demand) shut off your AC for 15 minutes periodically during the emergency. You hardly notice the difference because

your circulation fan keeps operating, but PG&E can thereby decrease the energy demand and prevent neighborhood blackouts.

ENERGY SAVINGS.

Ever wonder how much electric power an appliance is using? With a nifty little device called “Kill A Watt,” you can now find out which appliances in your house are energy abusers and which are not. This is a convenient plug-in meter that will monitor the kilowatt hour consumption of an item to learn how much it costs to run. Available for about \$20 at hardware stores and Internet outlets such as Amazon.com, a Kill A Watt could quickly pay for itself by pinpointing which of your appliances need to be eliminated, updated, or replaced.

There’s more. PG&E offers an “energy calculator” on their website at www.pge.com/myhome. Let’s say you want to know how much power your current refrigerator model is using. By entering information on your old fridge and a proposed new one, you’ll have an instant calculation of your savings!

REBATES

We’ve all heard a lot about rebates lately. Manufacturer’s rebates are probably the most familiar, but don’t forget about PG&E rebates on appliance purchases. If you’re shopping for a new clothes washer, dishwasher, furnace, or water heater, for example, you may qualify for a significant rebate. The amounts vary, but range from \$50 for a high efficiency clothes washer to \$300 for a gas furnace.

Visit www.pge.com/rebates for rebates and other incentives for your home. On this site you can get information as well as downloadable application forms.

BALANCED PAYMENT PLAN

Denise informed us about one more feature available through PG&E: Balanced Payment Plan (BPP). With this plan, PG&E will calculate your estimated annual cost of gas and electricity, divide it by 12, and set your monthly payment so that you pay the same amount each month. This way you can avoid large payments during high energy-usage months (July-August and January-February). Again, check out PG&E’s website for details.