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# common ground

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## The Green Issue

### BAY AREA PUMA

Mountain Lions Among Us

### SMART METER BACKLASH

Health Risks and Privacy Concerns

### MARTIN LUTHER KING, ECOLOGICAL THINKER

Exclusive New Study

The *Common Ground* Interview

**22-YEAR-OLD ERIN SCHRODE'S GREEN MILLENNIAL GENERATION**

LOVE LETTER TO THE EARTH

KARMA OF PLASTIC

ECOLOGY AND IMAGINATION

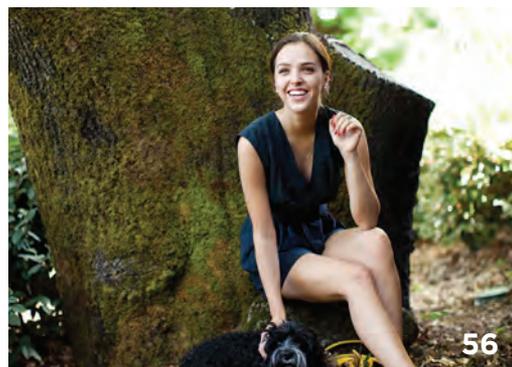
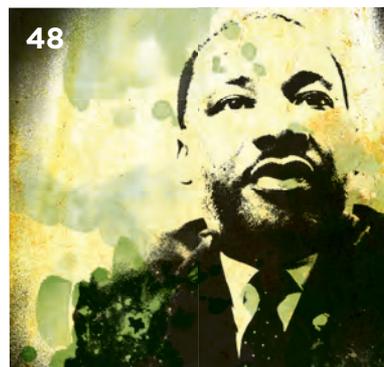
GMOS DEplete MONARCH BUTTERFLY

PEACE AND QUIET = GREEN



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APRIL 2014



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Photographed by Eric York

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from the publisher

## April Green Issue



Spring has sprung, and Earth Day beckons. Following a trend started in the last month's Food issue, wherein I interviewed 10-year-old Vivienne Harr, in this issue I spoke with Erin Schrode, the 22-year-old voice of the green millennial generation. I first noticed Erin in the parking lot of a mall eight years ago as she was protesting with the slogan "Lips Against Lead"—a reference to the carcinogenic ingredients manufacturers put in cosmetics. She was only 15, but already very outspoken and articulate as the founder of the nonprofit Teens Turning Green. Whereas the median age of our *Common Ground* interviewees is close to 70—accomplished baby boomers—Erin breaks the mold, a role to which she is accustomed.

Erin is globally recognized as an expert on millennials, the generation she represents. Besides being an A-student, she has traveled extensively and done a lot in her short life. She is someone the world will be hearing more about, and we believe you will enjoy our interview.

This month I viewed a documentary titled *Take Back Your Power*, produced and directed by Josh del Sol. The film, about the smart grid and the smart meter, captured my attention. Apparently, there's a growing backlash around the world against smart meters. Jeromy Johnson and Regina Meredith have contributed an article about this film, which I recommend.

One thing is certain—the amount of electromagnetic field (EMF) radiation that we collectively absorb into our bodies is unprecedented in human history. Daniel DeBaun likens the misinformation about EMFs to the tobacco industry's hiding of research about the harmful effects of smoking in previous decades. I pray that Daniel is wrong, but since we won't know anytime soon, it seems wise to apply the precautionary principle now.

In an exclusive preview, we share the scholarship of Drew Dellinger, who reveals how Martin Luther King Jr. was a profound environmentalist despite biographers largely ignoring this facet of MLK's outlook.

Zara McDonald has written an eloquent article about the Bay Area puma. Last year, I was struck by the image, now on our cover, of a wild puma kitten and immediately imagined an eventual cover story. Thank you, Zara.

On cautionary notes, Rohit Kumar has contributed a piece called "The Karma of Plastic," while Dana Perls warns about the effects that GMO crops are having on the monarch butterfly population. On lighter notes, Aninha Esperanza has written about awakening the visionary through ecology and the imagination, while Bruce Davis reminds us that "Peace and Quiet Is Green." Spiritual leader Thich Nhat Hanh has included "Your Wonder, Beauty, and Creativity: A Love Letter to the Earth."

We look forward to seeing you at the various Earth Day events taking place throughout the Bay Area, as well as at the New Living Expo, which takes place in San Mateo this year. In the beginning of May, meditation teachers Pema Chödrön and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche hold a valuable three-day retreat at the Craneway Pavilion in Richmond.

Your appreciation of *Common Ground* is best shown by patronizing our advertisers—the best. And please consider becoming an advertiser yourself. Our next issue, spanning May and June, is on the theme of creativity. Let us know your thoughts.

Green Is Clean,

ROB SIDON, *Publisher and Editor-in-Chief*

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# Smart Meters, The Opposite of Green

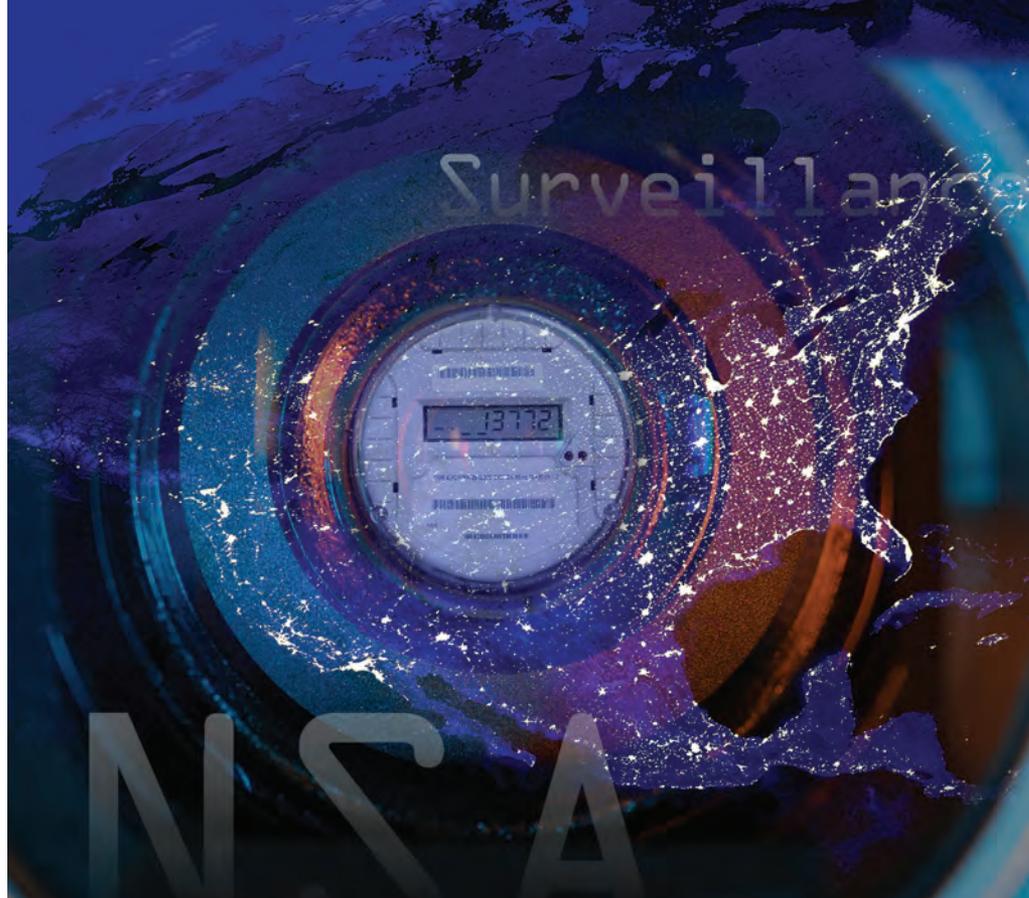
Award-Winning New Film, *Take Back Your Power*, Urges Revolt Against Threatening Device

BY JEROMY JOHNSON  
AND REGINA MEREDITH

Throughout the developed world, utility companies are rushing without informed consent to install wireless “smart” electrical meters on homes and businesses. To the surprise of the utility companies, a global resistance has developed against smart meters. On one side of the controversy are the corporations and governments who continue to say that smart meters are safe and who insist that we should just trust their “modernization” plans. On the other side is a growing chorus of independent scientists, doctors, privacy and legal experts, whistleblowers, injured people, and concerned citizens pushing back against smart meter programs.

To get to the bottom of this controversy and to find out exactly why so many people are against smart meters, filmmaker and transparency advocate Josh del Sol spent the past two years making a documentary about smart meters. *Take Back Your Power* is an eye-opening film that has already won multiple awards, including the Indie Fest Annual Humanitarian Award and the AwareGuide Transformational Film of the Year Award.

The film looks at the reasons why there are now over 200 anti-smart meter organizations around the world. The issues include privacy, surveillance / NSA data extraction, smart meter fires, hacking and electrical grid vulnerability, property rights, increased customer bills, time-of-use pricing, lack of energy savings, and health impacts.



The following are just some of the issues discussed in *Take Back Your Power* and within the emerging anti-smart meter community.

## The NSA, Surveillance, & the Constitution

Edward Snowden revealed how much the NSA knows about us from email, cell phone, and other communications data. He also showed us how technology companies are somewhat complicit in this surveillance. What is not often mentioned is that smart meters are an integral part of this surveillance network. Utility companies will maintain that your data is secure. However, if Google cannot protect your data from the NSA, do you really trust PG&E to? Furthermore, utility companies and commissions have even admitted they are seeking to market the data harvested by all smart meters on our homes.

What few people realize is that the next phase of the “smart” grid is for every appliance in your home to be connected wirelessly to your smart meter. Not only will this fill your home with microwave radiation (at much higher levels than currently exist), but it will also allow your utility to know when you are home, what your activities and habits are, and how many people are in your home at any given time. To take things further, there are plans to fit RFID (radio-frequency identification) chips even on food products that will be designed to transmit to your “smart” refrigera-

tor, which will transmit to your smart meter, which will send the data to PG&E, which will then sell the fact that your milk is expired to your cell phone carrier, which will send you a grocery store coupon for milk on your smart phone!

This may sound like a wonderful, futuristic world of convenience straight out of a *Jetsons* episode. However, for many people this is a dystopian horror show where corporations and governments have unfettered access to our lives. This push for ever more data may be good for technology company profits and for organizations like the NSA whose mission is surveillance, but is it good for society?

We must ask ourselves what it will mean for democracy and personal freedoms if we do not have basic privacy within our own homes. The smart meter programs are a direct violation of the Fourth Amendment to our Constitution, which protects us in our homes from unreasonable search and seizure. This would place the utility companies and governments above the Constitution.

## The “Internet of Things”

The next supposed wave of the Internet is called the “Internet of Things.” Smart meters are a major component of this because they are the gateway into our homes. The Internet of Things is a push by technology companies to connect everything we own to the Internet wirelessly. They are selling this idea as a con-

## healthy living » technology

venience because you will never lose your car keys and can turn off your oven from your smart phone.

However, there are two major problems with this idea.

First, any semblance of privacy and personal freedom will be gone. Google (which just purchased Nest, a “smart home” company, for \$3.2 billion) and other major technology companies, PG&E, and the NSA will have increasing amounts of data about you. If you are concerned about privacy and surveillance

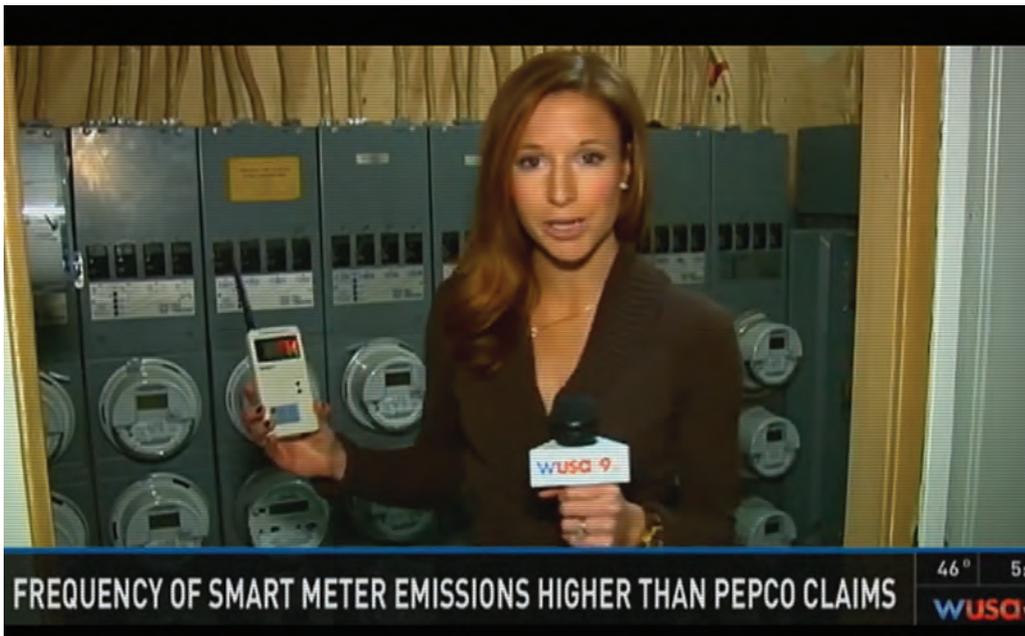
studies) that shows that microwave radiation damages biology. Thus, if the technology companies of Silicon Valley get their way, we will be needlessly filling our homes, our children, and ourselves with what is a potent toxin according to science, while industry and government tells us it is safe. Does this remind you of tobacco, asbestos, and DDT?

### Are Smart Meters Actually Green?

Have we all been fooled? In our drive to adopt any technology that promises to reduce our carbon footprint, we have blindly accepted that the solutions will not create even bigger

wife of Google Chairman Eric Schmidt, is on the NRDC board. As noted above, technology companies, including Google, stand to make immense profits from the Internet of Things and from connecting everything wirelessly through devices such as smart meters. Thus, NRDC support for smart meters may not just be about saving the planet. It may be that it is simply good for business.

Potential conflicts of interest and advertising budgets aside, are smart meters really a green technology? The experts interviewed in *Take Back Your Power* say they are anything but. In fact, many smart grid pilot studies have



now, wait until everything you own and most of your activities are connected wirelessly to the Internet.

According to a 2012 Congressional Research Report called *Smart Meter Data: Privacy and Cybersecurity*, “with smart meters, police will have access to data that might be used to track residents’ daily lives and routines while in their homes, including their eating, sleeping, and showering habits, what appliances they use and when, and whether they prefer the television to the treadmill, among a host of other details.”

Second, how do you think all of these things magically connect to the Internet? The answer is with pulsed digital microwave radiation that is already considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be a possible carcinogen. Many scientists say that with current scientific data, microwave radiation should be considered a *probable* carcinogen, with some even stating that it is a *definite* carcinogen. Furthermore, there is a wide body of independent scientific research (many thousands of

problems. This is particularly evident with smart meters.

Five years ago, utility companies like PG&E started to advertise their new smart meter programs as a green technology. (It was around this time that \$11 billion of stimulus funds were allocated for utilities to install smart grid technology, according to *Time* magazine.) Utilities spent millions to shift public perception and to financially support local environmental organizations. This financial support, and the perception that technology is the primary solution, may be the reason why much of the environmental community in the Bay Area still see smart meters as a green technology. However, that perception is beginning to shift.

Another reason we are led to believe that smart meters are green is that major environmental organizations, such as the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), are big proponents of smart meters and the smart grid. What is interesting about the NRDC, however, is its connection to the technology industry. For example, Wendy Schmidt, the



shown that smart meters do not save energy and may actually increase energy usage.

In fact, Northeast Utilities, which provides electricity to more than three million customers in New England, broke ranks in January and admitted that “there is no rational basis for this technology choice.”

Furthermore, it is becoming widely understood that it is anything but green to fill our homes and communities with the pulsed digital microwave radiation that smart meters emit. How can a technology be considered sustainable if its byproduct harms not only humans, but plants, insects, and animals?

It is now time for the Bay Area community to realize that smart meters are not a green technology. Better solutions exist, and the current way forward is unsustainable. It will be much more effective to spend resources to localize and decentralize our power generation (solar), utilize basic energy reduction techniques, and use inexpensive, off-the-shelf technology to monitor our utility use—for the very small percentage of people who actually check their energy use.

### Smart Meter Health Effects

Have you been experiencing headaches, sleep issues, fatigue, tinnitus and/or heart palpitations? Have you had a chronic condition sud-

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denly accelerate its pace or have infections that seemed particularly virulent? If so, you are not alone. Almost everywhere smart meters have been deployed, a percentage of the population begins to experience these symptoms (usually without even knowing that smart meters have been installed). These people may indeed be the canaries in the coal mine.

These symptoms are commonly labeled as a condition called electro-sensitivity (ES). In California alone thousands of people have experienced a plethora of health conditions once smart meters were installed and have had their lives completely changed. In Sweden, where ES is officially recognized and where wireless technology was first implemented, nearly 300,000 people are affected. Doctors and biologists around the world have stated that this is what happens when people are exposed to the microwave radiation and electrical pollution ("dirty electricity") that smart meters emit.

Of course, corporations such as PG&E say that smart meter emissions fall well below the supposedly "safe" levels that the government requires. However, what they fail to tell you is that the FCC guidelines are incredibly obsolete and do not cover long-term, low-level exposures from smart meters and other wireless devices. In fact, the guidelines only address the issue of protecting us from the heating of bodily tissue. This is an absurd idea and an outright lie considering what the current science shows us about the biological impacts of microwave radiation. See for yourself that most of the independent science shows deleterious biological effects from this type of pollution: [EMFanalysis.com/research.html](http://EMFanalysis.com/research.html).

*Take Back Your Power* goes deep into the health effects of smart meters. One important thing to note is that doctors interviewed in the film state that even if you are not consciously aware of any effects caused by smart meters, blood tests show that they are triggering chronic inflammation in your body, which can lead to many illnesses. The considerable harm to health, rights, and security make it important to take action now.

### How to Take Back Your Power

There are many effective actions we can all take to turn this tide. Here are some of the most important ways to grow awareness within your community:

- » Opt out of the smart meter program. You can do this by calling PG&E at 866-743-0263 and request that they put a safe analog meter back on your home.
- » As many people in California have done,

do not consent to or pay the opt-out fees. The legality of the fees has not even been determined by the California Public Utilities Commission. For some unknown reason, they have been delaying this legal decision for over two years. Paying to keep your health and rights can be called extortion. Send PG&E a registered letter telling them you do not consent to this change of terms in your contract with them, and will not pay any fees for keeping your analog meter. There are letter templates at [FreedomTaker.com](http://FreedomTaker.com).

- » Encourage your neighbors to opt out. This will create a community that is free of smart meter radiation and electrical pollution. Throughout California entire communities are smart meter-free, and 57 local governments have adopted ordinances against smart meters. Many buildings in the Bay Area have had all of their tenants opt out together. Organize this for your building or community.
- » Share this information with your neighbors and even with your PG&E repairman or meter reader. Initiate a conversation with your local government, which responds according to numbers and commitment within its constituent base. A good local resource for information is [EMSafetyNetwork.org](http://EMSafetyNetwork.org).
- » Attend or host a screening of *Take Back Your Power*. To watch the film online or on DVD, visit [TakeBackYourPower.net](http://TakeBackYourPower.net). Subscribe to their newsletter to join the global movement to ban and recall smart meters. That is the ultimate solution for this ill-conceived program.

**Special Bay Area screening:** There will be a screening of *Take Back Your Power* on **Saturday, April 26, at 7 p.m.** at the Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists, 1924 Cedar Street, Berkeley. Following the film, there will be a Q&A with the filmmaker, Josh del Sol. Donations will be accepted to support the cause. To reserve your seat for free, please visit: [TakeBackYourPower.net](http://TakeBackYourPower.net).

*Jeromy Johnson is a local safe-technology advocate with an advanced degree in civil and environmental engineering. Personally affected when smart meters were installed on his home, he went on to provide practical solutions for reducing electromagnetic field (EMF) pollution at his website, [EMFanalysis.com](http://EMFanalysis.com).*

*Regina Meredith is a TV correspondent who is engaged in the smart meter battle in her town of Sedona, AZ. Her show, "Open Minds," airs on Gaiam TV, [GaiamTV.com](http://GaiamTV.com)*



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Julie McGuinness began studying movement based expressive arts with Tamalpa Institute in 2001. She completed an internship in Integrative Medicine and Spirituality (focus: Art and Imagery) with The Institute for Health and Healing. In 2012 Julie graduated from CIIS with an MA in East-West Psychology



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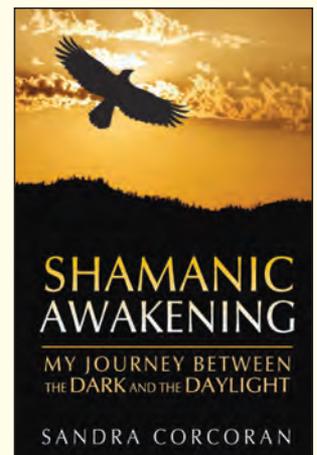
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