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NDP energy critic John Horgan wants the government to suspend the installation of smart meters until the B.C. Utilities Commission does a review.

The provincial NDP energy critic believes the “significant anxiety in the community” over B.C. Hydro’s smart meters has eclipsed public anger over the harmonized sales tax.

“I’ve received over 5,000 emails since sometime in June, more than any other issue I’ve dealt with in six years,” John Horgan, Juan de Fuca NDP MLA, told the *Georgia Straight* by phone. “I tabled a petition with 15,000-odd names last week. I am not a doctor. [Provincial health officer] Perry Kendall says there’s no health consequences. Others have a different point of view.”

Last week, the [Straight reported that Walt McGinnis](#), from the group [StopSmartMeters.ca](#), is calling for an initiative vote like the referendum in which the public voted to scrap the HST. Horgan said public awareness of smart meters is not widespread enough yet to make such a move viable in this case.

“I have called for the government to suspend the installation of the smart meters until the B.C. Utilities Commission can review the program to ensure that it’s cost-effective, it will achieve its objectives, and allow an opportunity for those who have concerns about health and privacy to have a public place to take those concerns,” Horgan said.

When the B.C. Liberal government mandated the installation of 1.8 million smart meters by December 2012, under the 2010 Clean Energy Act, it was a “mistake” to exempt it from BCUC scrutiny, Horgan added. The “second mistake” the government made was ignoring public concerns, he noted.

“What I know for sure is, whether people have actual health impacts or not, they are certainly having health impacts with the anxiety of these things being installed,” Horgan claimed. “It’s clear on the faces of the people that come and see me. It’s clear in the appeals in the emails. So you’d have to be pretty hardhearted to not pause and listen to people, and that [not listening] seems to be what Mr. [Rich] Coleman is doing.”

Energy and Mines Minister Rich Coleman did not respond to several messages left by the *Straight*.

John Cummins, leader of the B.C. Conservative Party, told the *Straight* he favours a moratorium on the smart meters, even though he has one on the side of his new home in Langley and has suffered no adverse health impacts.

“I would like to see the thing ended,” Cummins said by phone. “If we had been in government, this project would not have gone ahead. My view is that it’s a huge expense, one that Hydro can’t afford, given its debt, and I am wondering how they are going to pay for this stuff at the end of the day.”

Cindy Verschoor, B.C. Hydro spokesperson for the smart-meter program, told the *Straight* that 370,000 of the devices have been installed provincewide to date.

“The meters are safe,” Verschoor said by phone. “We’ve just completed independent testing of the meters. They use the same technology...it’s radio frequency similar to your TV or radio. The total transmission time of the meters—that has been independently recorded in our independent testing results—is 2.734 seconds per day [per one-watt meter].”

Verschoor repeated the claim that exposure to the smart meter for its 20-year life span would equal the radio-frequency exposure of one 30-minute phone call.

“That is simple mathematics, again,” Verschoor said. “It’s an engineering equation. It’s not a big secret. It’s a fact.”

However, Verschoor did not have the information to back up her claim “in front of her”. By press time, she had still not explained how the utility reached that conclusion. Verschoor said she did not know how many smart meters were uninstalled following public complaints during or after installation.

For Horgan, the buck stops with Coleman.

"And you know what the problem there is?" Horgan added. "I am in opposition and he's the Minister of...Everything. So if you want to know why they are doing it, you should ask him."