

Duke Energy customers question newly installed smart meters

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BLOOMINGTON, Ind. – Dozens of Duke Energy customers are questioning whether new smart meters in their area are deficient.

Several people called CBS4 this winter asking why their heat and energy bills had more than doubled. They said even though central Indiana experienced one of the coldest winters on record, they kept their thermostats at the same temperature most of the time.

“We have blackout curtains that we try to keep the heat out and we have a gas fireplace that we run so I don’t understand why our electric bill is so high,” Dorrine Neal said. “Our bill jumped from \$298 to \$460 in one month.”

After talking to her neighbors, Neal wonders whether there is more to the story than just wanting the house to be warmer.

"Something is suspicious," she said. "This has all happened since we got the new smart meters."

CBS4 did some digging and found out Duke Energy has installed 315,000 smart meters statewide so far. They plan to have 518,000 by the end of 2018. They claim the new devices are more efficient, convenient and customer friendly.

"You can track your daily energy usage, you can go online you can see how much energy you used on a particular day and see in a graphical form," said Duke Energy spokesperson Lew Middleton.

Middleton said when the smart meters are shipped from the factory, they are tested, certified and tested again to ensure they are working properly. He rebuffed customers' notions that something was defunct.

"It's very, very, very unlikely the problem is going to be with a meter," he said.

Duke Energy has had a slew of similar issues, though, nationwide. A simple Google search reveals news reports covering criticism in Ohio, Kentucky and even Florida, with customers asking why their bills are so high.

Indiana's Utility Commission admits it came face to face with a near fallout in 2017. Records show more than 300 customers complained about high bills within a six-month period. The commission eventually held a public meeting for residents in the Greencastle and Terre Haute areas, where Duke Energy was forced to explain themselves and the smart meter installation process.

When CBS4 asked the commission whether they had investigated further, a spokesperson sent a statement:

"Following the meeting, the Consumer Affairs Division continued to review each complaint and inquiry on a case-by-case basis. The Division continues to monitor for any trends or spikes in complaints filed before the Commission."

Records for 2018 show fewer complaints.

"The problem is that people have a hard time remembering how much energy they may have used on any given day," Middleton said.

He went on to say that Duke Energy does not plan on auditing the meters any further.