

The Smart Grid is Kinda Dumb

☒ Smart Grid is one of those phrases that everyone likes the sound of, but know little about. What is the Smart Grid? On the surface it would seem it is like the electric grid we have now, only better. Wikipedia says..."A smart grid is an electrical grid that uses information and communications technology to gather and act on information, such as information about the behaviors of suppliers and consumers, in an automated fashion to improve the efficiency, reliability, economics, and sustainability of the production and distribution of electricity." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smart_grid) Wow, that sounds great when do we start?

Whenever "experts" are interviewed about this they concentrate on the supply chain "smartness", but they rarely dwell on the demand solutions of the "Smart Grid". Supply chain changes are very good, in that they reroute supply of energy on the fly, to make sure the grid stays electrified. The demand side is where manufacturers install devices on your appliances, so the Public Utility can control them. This is said to be necessary if you as the consumer are using more than your fair share of electricity, and more is needed for high priority customers. So the solution to not enough power, is to ration who gets the power.

An early sign that we are headed in this direction is PSE&G's (NJ utility) Cool Customer Program. There may be similar programs being rolled out throughout the country. It is said to *"Save energy...save money...and help the environment at the same time. An easy, voluntary way to manage your home energy use in the summer...and all year round."* This voluntary program gives you a setback thermostat, and a \$50 credit on your bill.

This sounds like an awesome program, since the setback thermostat is worth over \$200. If you read more of the details, they let you know how you get to save the environment

too. On those particularly hot days when the utility does not have enough supply of electricity to satisfy their customers, THEY TURN OFF YOUR AIR CONDITIONING! Just think how much energy you will save when they cycle off your air conditioning every 15 minutes. They assure you that this will only happen on the hottest days of the year.

Why wait for manufacturers to install the monitoring devices on your dishwasher, when Air Conditioning is one of the heaviest uses of electricity. It is not surprising that this is the earliest demand target. If there are not enough volunteers, however, we can logically assume where this program goes next. Phase two probably makes the set back thermostat required in order to receive power. Phase three is when they just come and take away your air conditioner. Phase four they have another family move into your house. You are probably using more than your fair share of electricity anyway.

In the old days, price would regulate the use of products such as electricity. If you use more, you pay more. Markets would lead us to the right balance between supply and demand. As the price goes up, we find cheaper energy, or invent more efficient ways to use it. This does not seem to be enough anymore. 'If we are to save the environment we must force people to behave a certain way', seems to be the vision. The standard solution to every problem out of government, or quasi-government such as public utilities, is more control and less freedom.