



## Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Why are we doing this?

City Council and Staff are working hard to improve the utility systems – to make them reliable, predictable and affordable. This program does all three.

### 2. How does it make utilities more reliable?

Multiple ways. 80% of the water meters are past their usable life, so they're long overdue for replacement. Also, because this constantly reads, rather than reading once per month, you are able to get earlier notifications of potential leaks.

### 3. How does it make utilities more predictable?

The way we have been reading meters, we have had one person who spends every day reading meters – all month long. While we strive to have the same schedule, your meter may not be read on the same day every month. This system will read constantly and report at the same time/day every month. It also avoids potential human error entry issues.

### 4. How does it make utilities more affordable?

First, we're currently facing some major growth. Installing this system now ensures that the builders assume the cost of the new electronic meters in the new homes and businesses, so existing residents and businesses are not burdened by that cost. Second, because when water meters fail, they always read less than they should. Making sure that the meters are reading the correct usage, each one of us will pay for their own usage, rather than everyone assuming the cost for others' failed readings. Third, because this system can catch leaks earlier, if you do experience a leak, you can catch it sooner and reduce the huge cost of water leaking out during that event. Finally, if we didn't do this now, we would have to increase costs by adding additional meter readers as new houses are built.

### 5. What is "AMI"?

AMI stands for Advanced Metering Infrastructure. These new AMI meters consist of a water, gas or electric meter, a register, and a low-powered communication device/radio that is integrated in a single unit. The register is continuously recording usage and the radio sends a meter reading to a Base Station which is mounted on an elevated water storage tank. The Base Station transmits the read over a secure network every 6 hours back to the meter data management software which is located in the cloud. With this upgrade and the integration of this data into our customer portal software, you will have access to more frequent and detailed information about your water consumption, enabling you to have better control over your water usage and monthly bills. *More to come on this!*

### 6. Why is my meter being retrofitted or replaced?

The City of Castroville has made the decision to convert all meters to AMI for improved data collection and to provide customers with more frequent and detailed information about their water consumption. A large majority of the meters were past their useful life.



## 7. When will this work be performed?

The work began on April 17<sup>th</sup> of this year. The entire project will take approximately 6 months. In most cases, the transition will be completely transparent and will not affect the residents. The work will be performed during normal working hours of 7:00 AM – 5:00 PM.

## 8. How do I know who is authorized to do the work?

Ameresco contractors will be wearing bright yellow vests with “AMERESCO” or “RTS/Envocore” placards on their trucks and carrying a letter on City of Castroville letterhead. Also, Contract Callers Inc. will be conducting the gas meter replacements.

## 9. Do they need to come inside my house?

No, they do not need to enter your home with the exception of gas meter replacements. If the meter is behind a fence, workers will need access to that part of the property.

## 10. Is there any special care or maintenance that I need to do to my new meter?

Your new meter does not require any maintenance by the homeowner. The City of Castroville will take care of all maintenance. Special care should be taken to NOT mow over the top of the water meter box, please use handheld devices to trim grass or weeds away from the meter box.

## 11. How does this enhance customer service?

The AMI water meters provide daily and hourly usage information, along with your current monthly information. Each household, after new meters are installed, can monitor their usage by logging on to the WaterSmart portal provided by the City of Castroville. *The customer portal will be available at a later date.* Through the WaterSmart portal, you can elect to receive text message, e-mail, or phone call alerts, if your water usage indicates a potential leak or abnormal usage. More details will be provided when the portal becomes available.

## 12. Did you say my water bill may go up?

Possibly. Older mechanical meters tend to lose accuracy as they age and, therefore, may not accurately measure all the water being used. The new meters will accurately measure your water, electricity, and gas usage. All new meters are tested prior to delivery by the manufacturer to ensure that they register properly. If you see a higher bill immediately upon the new meter installation and you have not changed your utility usage pattern, it is likely the old meter was running slow. In the case of water meters, you might have a minor leak in the system that was not registering correctly through the old meter.

## 13. Will the electronic device on the meter interfere with other electronic equipment?

No. The radio transmission operates in compliance with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations to avoid interference with other electronic devices.

## 14. Is the electronic device and data encrypted?

Yes. Data transmitted from the meter through the system is encrypted through the entire process.

## 15. Is this part of a fixed (closed) network?



Yes. The fixed network will collect readings at fixed data collection points and transmit them electronically for billing purposes without staff needing to go to the location of the meters.

**16. How will I know that you have my reading and not someone else's reading?**

Each radio frequency device has a unique identification number, which is transmitted along with the meter reading. The unique number is compared to your account record electronically to ensure a match.

**17. Will there still be meter readers?**

No. Staff will continue to visit your property for routine service, maintenance, or repair. We may visit your location to read the meter as part of routine validation. We will continue to respond to water emergencies.

**18. Are there any concerns regarding the use of Radio Frequency (RF) to read my new meter?**

Digital meters operate at much lower levels of radio frequencies than cell phones, microwaves, wireless routers and even baby monitors. All equipment operates in compliance with state and federal communication standards.

**19. I still have questions, where can I get additional information?**

The City of Castroville is working with Ameresco to answer everyone's questions as thoroughly as possible. We have taken the following additional steps to answer questions:

- Continue to visit the dedicated project website for updates and lookahead schedule to see where installations will take place.
- Residents may contact the Public Works at **(830) 931-4090**.