

Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why has SaskEnergy decided to install AMI devices?

The installation of AMI natural gas modules is part of SaskEnergy's plans to renew and prepare the province's energy infrastructure for the future, while continuing to enhance customer service.

Many jurisdictions across North America are adopting this new and more efficient technology. Natural gas modules will record consumption on a daily basis, eliminating estimates for billing purposes.

2. How will the new AMI natural gas modules work?

The modules can be checked without having to physically access the meter. Once installed and operational, the modules will send actual information on energy usage instead of estimates. Meter reading will no longer require periodic trips by personnel to physically read a customer's meter and estimates for billing purposes will be significantly reduced or eliminated.

3. What is the AMI installation process for SaskEnergy?

The AMI natural gas module will take approximately 10 minutes to install onto the existing meter.

The retrofit process involves the removal of a dial plate or dial index from the front of the meter. What this dial index looks like varies at each location — it may either look like an odometer in a car or it may have four or five smaller dials with hands that resemble a watch. The dial index is first removed from the meter and attached to the new battery-operated, electronic gas module, which will allow it to send actual readings on natural gas consumption. The entire module is then placed inside a protective plastic cover, reattached and resealed to the existing meter.

By using the original dial index, the customer's meter reading does not change, and there is no need for SaskEnergy to change billing information, which would be required if the entire meter was replaced or if a new dial index was installed.

4. Is there anything people will need to do to prepare their property for these meter upgrades?

The AMI gas module installations are simple and take about 10 minutes. To ensure the visit occurs within a short timeframe and to avoid scheduling an appointment, homeowners will need to ensure their natural gas meters are free of any obstructions, such as bushes or yard tools.

5. Who will be installing these modules?

The module will be installed by a SaskEnergy Technician or by a representative from Grid One Solutions. Grid One Solutions has been contracted by SaskEnergy to install 380,000 natural gas modules. Grid One brings many benefits, such as:

- Strong safety and customer service practices.
- Extensive experience in urban & rural settings through previous AMI projects.
- Significant experience with gas AMI installations.

All Grid One Solutions installers and vehicles will carry identification clearly indicating they are contracted by SaskEnergy.

6. Will the installation of the natural gas module interrupt my service?

The dial index of the natural gas meter is located on a part of the meter that does not disrupt the flow of natural gas, therefore, there will be no interruption of your service.

7. A field representative was already at my premise to install the new AMI technology, why are they here again?

Customers could experience up to two visits to their premise as part of the installation process. This includes the installation of the gas module and/or to perform a field audit on work that has been completed for quality assurance purposes. Depending on scheduling or weather conditions there can be several days between each visit.

All Grid One Solutions installers, field representatives, and vehicles associated with the project clearly identify that they are contracted by SaskEnergy. Installers will also leave behind information indicating what work was completed.

8. How will customer information be protected?

Protecting our customers' information is a top priority. The natural gas module does not contain any personally identifiable information. SaskEnergy is in full compliance with Saskatchewan's privacy legislation and is working with the provincial Information and Privacy Commissioner.

A customer's energy consumption data will be protected with the latest technology before it is sent over the network.

9. What wireless communication networks (radio frequency) are used by the AMI natural gas modules?

The radio frequencies (RF) used in AMI natural gas modules are no different than what are used in cellular or cordless phones, TV broadcasting, FM audio broadcasting and portable radios. The natural gas module operates on one low voltage, single cell battery and sends a message up to six times daily and has an expected life of 20 years. In comparison to these other RF sources, it is very low because the transmissions are of a very short duration.

10. Can your project also be called “Smart” Meters?

No. The term Smart Meter refers to electricity meters only as they have the ability to perform additional functions compared to a natural gas module, which can only provide natural gas consumption data. The natural gas module is typically referred to as Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI).

11. What are the benefits of the AMI program for SaskEnergy once fully implemented?

Benefits of the AMI program include:

- Significantly reducing our costs for manual meter reading services.
- Actual billing instead of estimates - very few estimates will be required and actual usage will more accurately reflect the energy used by customers on a regular basis.
- The new system will be helpful to the environment by reducing its carbon footprint for both Crowns. For example, eliminating the need to dispatch service technicians for meter reads.
- SaskEnergy will recover costs for project implementation within seven to ten years of installation.
- Saskatchewan will keep pace with other regions in North America who have modernized their systems (B.C., Alberta and Ontario).

12. What experience does SaskEnergy have with AMI technology?

SaskEnergy has many years of experience with automated meter technology. In 2009, SaskEnergy worked with the City of Swift Current on a joint pilot project to upgrade all natural gas, electricity and water meters for over 6,000 customers to automated meter reading units that retrieve data on demand. The result to-date has been positive, with cost savings, improved billing and operational efficiencies being realized.

The AMI project has successfully completed different phases of testing to ensure the system works properly prior to province-wide installations. The first field test was conducted by both SaskEnergy and SaskPower in the Town of Hanley and surrounding area in 2012.

Approximately 50 gas modules were installed in June 2012. The field test verified the configuration of the system and the wireless network. The natural gas modules performed successfully as expected.

To date, over 324,000 natural gas modules have been installed.

13. Why did Grid One come to my property but left without performing any work?

Grid One may not complete the natural gas module installation for a number of reasons, including:

- Access to the meter is restricted (locked gates, snow/ice, dogs).
- Installing the module is restrictive (meter too close to the fence, no clearance).
- The meter is damaged or has a broken seal. As per Measurement Canada Standards, meters with broken seals must be replaced. A broken seal does not impact the meter accuracy nor is it a safety concern. It is simply a regulation that needs to be addressed. If this occurs, Grid One will report these meters to SaskEnergy and a meter exchange will be arranged at a later date.