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Smart Metering – A Criminal's Charter

Why did I become interested?

Having read and heard about a member of the House of Lords being accused of taking money to promote a "Smart Metering" Bill through parliament, I became interested in the subject. Why in the UK would companies or organisations resort to this kind of illegal behaviour if the product or service was not controversial?

Why am I concerned?

Apart from having a criminal physically in my house or having some surveillance "1984" type in my home, the installation of Smart Metering is the next best thing to monitor my daily life.

Who is looking after my interests?

Within the context of the Ref: 94e/10 there is constant reference to "stakeholders". This is bureaucratic jargon for some chosen conglomeration of what or who? You informed me that Consumer Focus was the group responsible covering my concerns. By going to their website I note they have no expertise or remit regarding data protection in depth to assess the impact of Smart Metering from a criminal point of view.

Global experience

Reference is made to what is happening in the Netherlands and other countries. While I accept there is some experience to be gained, the UK is wanton in the case of Data Protection. Within recent times there have been several lapses.

- a. The NHS failed to destroy records correctly and the records were strewn over various locations.
- b. The MOD losses several laptops per year.
- c. Records containing children dates of birth and addresses went missing.
- d. A UK citizen with Asperger's syndrome breaks into the USA Pentagon computers and you assume that they had some of the best security going.

These are just some of the breaches I know about. It is not the sort of thing organisations want in the public domain and I therefore believe there are many more cases.

Private company

The information that is going to be collected and stored is by a private company and I am not sure from reading the reference what "checks and balances" will be put in place. The inference in the document is that my private details can be passed on beyond the direct supply company. I cannot see the need for personal details being required beyond the initial billing organisation. You need to prove to me why this would be needed. I can understand the desire to collate certain consumption patterns from areas or zones but the private details of consumers are not needed further up the line. The company will not be subject to "Freedom of Information Act" and therefore certain restrictions may be relaxed as time goes on. Companies have a habit of selling profiles of customers to other organisations so they can make money from the process. This should not be permitted under this process.

Consumer lifestyle

Having read several articles on the Smart Metering process, it obvious that the level of detail that the system can obtain about a consumer is immense. I am aware of friends who take their annual summer holiday religiously the second week of June, for a fortnight, every year. Other friends go to a tea dance once a week and leave their house every Tuesday for a set period of time. After two to three years this sort of information as to household patterns can be a burglar's handbook to which and when to enter homes. Along with what Google provide on the internet regarding pictures of homes from the air and from the front view of houses, the burglar will no longer have to "case" the premises. For a price anything can be obtained. Will Ofgem or the companies guarantee that the protection processes are so secure that unauthorised use of the information cannot happen? What will the penalty be for a breach in this context?

Democracy?

I have lived long enough to know that democracy in the UK is solely in the hands of a Minister of State once law is enacted. What guarantees are there that the legislation once passed will not be amended by reference to a Minister of State only? Parliament should be the only place to have a review of any amendment on this subject.

Conclusion

Due to time constraints I am unable to form a focus group of my own to take opinion and assessment of these proposals. I would therefore request I be informed when the next part of the process is out for consultation and be given ample time to give a proper response.

Yours sincerely

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