

October 5, 2010, 2:15 pm
New York Times

Smart Water Meters Catch On in Iowa

By [TODD WOODY](#)

I.B.M. Water meters that send wireless alerts have been installed in a pilot project in Dubuque, Iowa.

While some California cities [move to ban](#) smart electricity meters over fears about their impact on human health, residents of Dubuque, Iowa, are embracing smart water meters.

Like smart electricity meters, smart water meters measure consumption and wirelessly transmit the data to utilities. In Dubuque, 311 households have volunteered to have smart water meters installed as part of a pilot project between the city and I.B.M. to see if giving residents information on their water use in real time will prompt them to conserve. The project is also intended to help city officials spot and repair leaks in the water system as they happen.

“The more frequently water use is monitored, the more quickly things like leaks can be detected and addressed,” Milind Naphade, program director for I.B.M.’s [smarter city](#) services, said in an e-mail. “Also, we’ll be able to better identify trends and patterns over time more quickly with this frequency.”

Many water bills are issued quarterly, so residents may not notice a spike in consumption as a result of leaks or other problems for months. The smart meters in Dubuque, on the other hand, will transmit data on a home’s water use to I.B.M. computers every 15 minutes.

Residents can go to a Web site to monitor their water use.

“Water isn’t generally seen as something of value — even though water managers in 36 states expect to face water shortages in the next few years,” Mr. Naphade wrote. “By providing this level of detailed information to program participants, we can help them really understand where their water is going, and where they can make changes in terms of how and when they use water to reduce the overall amount they’re using on a daily basis.”

Cutting water use also saves the city energy costs as less electricity is needed for pumping, city officials noted.

“What our volunteer households are accomplishing is the first step to understanding waste and ultimately the conservation of valuable resources to sustain life quality for generations to come,” Dubuque’s mayor, Roy D. Buol, said in a statement.

The pilot project began in September and will continue until December, I.B.M said. In the longer term, the city of 60,000 plans to roll out smart water meters to all of its households as part of a sustainability initiative called [Dubuque 2.0](#).

I.B.M. and the city also are collaborating on a program to deploy technology to improve the efficiency of Dubuque’s energy and transportation systems.