

Smart move “to escape” Jamie First

A small white box has caused untold grief for a Balwyn North family of four, eventually forcing them out of their home.

John Aparo and Virginia Lo Giudice and their two sons, Alexander and Lucas, said they were left with no choice but to move after their smart meter was installed.

“I started having heart palpitations and not being able to sleep,” Mrs Lo Giudice said.

“It would take me an hour to get to sleep and then I was constantly waking up every couple of hours.

“I also had nausea during the morning and headaches, was always fatigued and had no energy, and just had a general feeling of being unwell.”

Mrs Lo Giudice said she hadn’t experienced those symptoms before the smart meter was fitted.

She said she saw her doctor, who carried out a number of tests, but couldn’t find any underlying issues.

The 49-year-old said she called CitiPower — who had connected the electronic device outside her bedroom window — to see if she could have it removed or relocated, but was unsuccessful.

“They said it wasn’t reversible, that I had to live with it and that’s the way it was.

“When I said I was experiencing problems, they said there’s no evidence.

“They gave me the run-around and said they won’t be accepting a direct correlation between what was happening with me and the smart meter, and said there’s nothing they could do.”

CitiPower spokesman Drew Douglas said it, along with Powercor Australia, had put in all but 4000 smart meters, out of 1.1 million in their area.

“Throughout the entire process we’ve tried to work with customers for anyone that has concerns about smart meters for any reason, keeping in mind it was a government-mandated program.”

“Once the meters had been installed, we didn’t have old meters to put back in,” he said, referring to Mrs Lo Giudice’s case.

Mrs Lo Giudice said she had exhausted all her options.

“I painted it with special paint from Germany that cost me a fortune, we had someone come out and test the levels of radiation coming through ... I bought these shields.

“I just tried to make it manageable.”

She said she even redesigned the layout of her home to avoid the smart meter.

“I had to move my bedroom downstairs because that was the furthest point from it and I was going insane from the lack of sleep.”

Eventually though, it all became too much for her.

“In the end, it was too hard to reconfigure the house, so I thought if we can’t move the smart meter, we’ll just move ourselves.

“I was sick and tired of feeling that way and I know that when we went away or when I wasn’t near the smart meter, my symptoms went away and I felt good, so I didn’t want to risk any further complications.”

Mrs Lo Giudice said she didn’t want to leave the area she was living in, so she moved into another house on the same street when it became available.

The latest update on the state government smart meters’ website states nearly 2.8 million meters have been fitted in Victoria.

Energy and resources minister Lily D’Ambrosio said the rollout had now effectively been completed.

“Smart meters are the standard metering infrastructure in Victoria, and electricity distributors are required to install smart meters in all new or refurbished premises,” Ms D’Ambrosio said.

“Independent testing has shown that electromagnetic signals are lower than many other common household devices, such as cordless phones and baby monitors.”

Mr Douglas said the smart meter’s internal radio transmitter worked at approximately half the signal strength of a mobile phone.

“It makes the equivalent of a mobile phone call of a few seconds length, several times a day,” he said.

But Lou Coppola, a candidate for the People Power Victoria — No Smart Meters party at November’s state election, said the government hadn’t conducted any long-term research into the meters’ health effects.

“If Virginia was the only case, you could say it’s one of those freaky sorts of things and there’s probably not enough data to make a considered or informed decision,” Mr Coppola said.

“But when you consider there are thousands of people that are sensitive to electromagnetic radiation, which is emitted by the smart meters, you have to say there is a problem.

“Victoria has a population in the order of six million people and it’s well-known, through international research, that about two to three per cent are severely impacted by electromagnetic radiation. We’re talking tens of thousands of people.”

Fast Facts:

- Smart meters measure and record electricity usage every 30 minutes
- Readings are sent automatically to electricity distributors
- Victoria’s five electricity providers — CitiPower, Powercor, Jemena, United Energy and SP AusNet — install, manage and own the meters
- Meters were first introduced in 2008
- Nearly 2.8 million have been installed in Victoria