

# METERS TO REPORT OUTAGES

With smart devices, PSEG LI customers won't need to call

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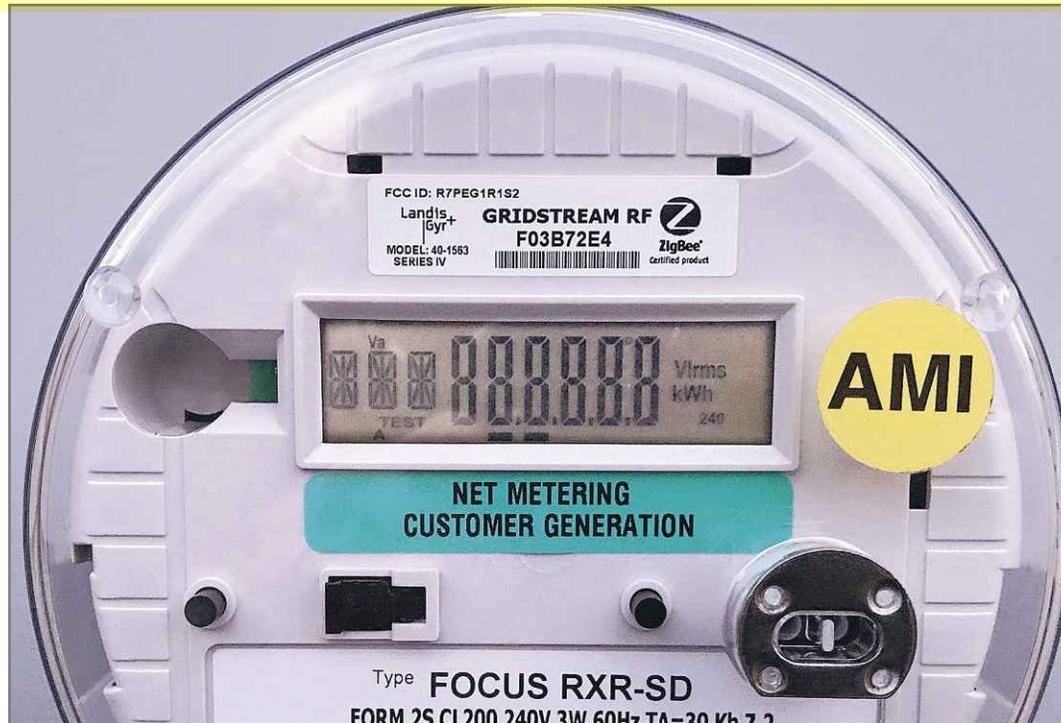
For PSEG Long Island customers, the need to talk to a service representative over the phone is fading as fast as the incandescent light bulb.

With large-scale rollout of smart meters to some 250,000 homes this year, PSEG is fast approaching a day when customers won't need to call the utility at all to report electricity outages, an official said.

The prospect of not having to lift the phone to alert the utility of a problem will come for smart-meter customers later this year, although PSEG won't promote the feature until all 1.1 million customers have the advanced meters by 2022, said Daniel Eichhorn, president and chief operating officer.

While only about a quarter of customers who experience an outage call it in anyway, the pending plan to do away with call-ins accompanies a trend toward lesser use of the phone to deal with the utility.

Call center volume for PSEG has declined an average 6 percent a year between 2014 and 2018, to 1.38 million calls last year from 1.77 million in 2014. In recent storms, most customers texted in outages. PSEG manages the grid under a long-



PSEG Long Island is going ahead with a large-scale rollout of smart meters, similar to this one.

term contract to LIPA begun in 2014.

Meanwhile, PSEG customers this year set a record for the number of service transactions they completed without talking to a company representative, according to recently released figures. Last year, the company logged some 7.3 million self-service transactions, a jump from the 5.1 million logged when the company took over management of the system in 2014. Most of the transactions related to electronic bill pay-

ments, which jumped to 6.99 million in 2018 from 5 million in 2014, followed by paperless billing and web-based energy audits.

Automation and technology are propelling the moves.

PSEG this year is stepping up the installation of smart meters, at a pace of around 1,000 a day. The meters allow regular exchange of usage information throughout the day, allowing PSEG to, among other things, eliminate estimated billing. Part of the effort will involve

creating a link from the company's power-outage management system to the smart meter network. When that happens, said Eichhorn, the utility will know automatically when an outage occurs in customer locations that have smart meters, which use radio-frequency technology to send data to and from customer homes and businesses. The units can provide nearly real-time data on customer usage but also can be used to remotely switch service and or off, and monitor

whether service is active.

"It's just making an interface and tying the two [systems] in together," to complete the link, Eichhorn said. By the time the rollout of smart meters is completed in 2022, the utility will have the capability to locate and isolate outages without customers reporting them.

The few customers who opt not to get a smart meter must pay a monthly meter reading fee of \$10. If you take installation of a smart meter, then decide later you don't want it, it will cost \$65 to have it removed.

PSEG last year installed 66,488 smart meters, on top of 47,090 in 2017. By the end of 2019 around a third of customers will have smart meters, and just about all 1.1 million customers will have them in the next four years.

Until then, Eichhorn said, PSEG doesn't plan on telling customers to stop calling in or, more likely, texting outages using their smartphones. Only around 25 percent to 30 percent of customers ever call in their outages, he said.

The increased use of self-service doesn't appear to be frustrating customers. Complaints to the state Department of Public Service are the state's lowest at 4.7 per 100,000 customers, PSEG said, and the average speed of answering calls when customers request a representative has dropped to 15 seconds from 54 seconds in 2014. PSEG's customer satisfaction rating with JD Power has also increased.

## Bills would protect LI coastline, marine life

BY DAVID M. SCHWARTZ  
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State Senate leaders said Sunday they will pass a pair of bills this week aimed at protecting Long Island's coastline and marine life by banning permits for offshore drilling operations and protecting menhaden, the oily baitfish feasted upon by striped bass, whales and other predators.

At a news conference on the Long Beach boardwalk, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stew-

art-Cousins (D-Yonkers) predicted the measures would pass the Senate on Tuesday.

"We will stand up for Long Island. We will stand up for our environment," she said.

The bill on menhaden, also known as bunker, would prevent purse seining, a method in which commercial fishing vessels, aided by spotter planes, encircle a school of fish with a net before sucking them onboard with a vacuum.

The bill would ban the method in New York waters,

which extend 3 miles offshore.

"This rule that will keep the industrial-scale fishery out of New York will help everything from whales, to dolphins, to striped bass, bluefish and all of our fishing business that relies on those species being abundant," Carl LoBue, The Nature Conservancy's New York oceans program director, said.

Marine experts say more whales have been spotted in shore due to the increased menhaden population. "It's a key fish in the ecosystem that had

once been overfished before, and we're not going to let it happen again," said state Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach).

LoBue said commercial purse seining boats fished in New York waters this year in Gardiners Bay and west of Shelter Island. Farther west, boats came near New York waters, but stayed in federally regulated areas.

A spokesman for Omega Protein, the largest menhaden fishing corporation, said Sunday that the proposed bill was cos-

metic because the company catches most of its fish off Maryland and Virginia. "This bill is more a feel-good piece of legislation for environmentalists, but will have no impact on us at all," said Ben Landry, the spokesman for Omega Protein, which uses the fish in aquaculture, pet food and fish oil.

The other bill would prohibit state agencies from processing applications for pipelines or other transportation and distribution services needed to facilitate offshore drilling.