

Calif. city gets free Wi-Fi via high tech meters

March 27 2013, by Martha Mendoza

The city of Santa Clara is flipping on a big Internet switch this week, becoming what it says is the first in the country to use wireless, digital "smart meters" on homes as channels for free citywide outdoor Wi-Fi.

[Silicon Valley](#) Power is replacing Santa Clara's electric meters to eliminate door-by-door meter readers. The new meters send electricity and water usage reports via wireless network, but also have an unusual separate channel that provides free, outdoor Internet.

Many communities already have pockets or limited free Wi-Fi, often provided by [Google](#) or centered around public hotspots like parks, hospitals or libraries.

Sascha Meinrath, director of the Washington, D.C.-based Open Technology Institute, said using meters as Internet channels is "really smart" but warned that strong privacy protections must be installed as well.

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