

AT&T's 5G in Berkeley

A vigil during the wee hours of Monday, October 5

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For several weeks people prevented AT&T from installing 5G devices in the first two locations in Berkeley. A key part of the project consisted of placing antennas on utility poles at the corner of Gilman and Neilson streets and near the Monterey Market on Hopkins Street. These are tiny business districts with coffee shops, restaurants, a natural grocery and other small shops in a residential area.

Residents and workers feared negative health effects from the radiation, that 5G just might even turn the district into a slow-acting microwave oven. So whenever AT&T's installation crews showed up with trucks and equipment, small groups of activists and residents would gather around the base of the poles, occupying the sites and blocking the work. Thus, eight installation attempts were thwarted.

Police did not intervene. Mayor Jesse Arreguin and the city council were allowing AT&T to proceed with their installation plans, while at the same time not allowing police to intervene or arrest protesters. But since a multibillion dollar corporation was involved, it was not certain how this might play out.

Finally, in October, AT&T came up with a new tactic. Instead of coming in the daytime and having the locals meet and block them, they decided to come on Monday, October 5th at one A.M., put up a fence around the pole to keep protesters away, enabling the subcontractors to install the antenna.

To counter this our home team called for a midnight vigil, sending out an email saying in part, "This looks like the crucial moment. . . . If you cannot come at midnight, please come at 7 AM for the second shift." The idea was to get there first.

Midnight? I'd attended one or two of the previous events, in the daytime of course. I didn't really know how dangerous this 5G might be, but anyone who's ever put food into a microwave oven must know that microwaves can burn. Even high voltage power lines are not harmless to people who are unfortunate enough to live under them. A friend of mine is an electronics engineer who worked around antennas and radio frequency radiation for many decades, considering that to be harmless till he developed symptoms of leukemia.

Our city should exercise caution. The fact that this 5G project was being approved almost on the sly, without notifying people of hearings, without openness, suggested to me that there might be something unhealthy about this. People who had written to Berkeley city officials asking for hearings received no replies.

Looking for more information, I found a signed statement from "more than 180 scientists and doctors from 35 countries, [recommending a moratorium](#) on the roll-out of the fifth

generation, 5G, for telecommunication until potential hazards for human health and the environment have been fully investigated by scientists independent from industry.” It’s about three pages, well written and readable.

Here are two articles from Scientific American, “New Studies Link [Cell Phone Radiation](#) with Cancer.” and “[We Have No Reason to Believe 5G Is Safe](#)” by Joel M. Moskowitz of UC Berkeley’s School of Public Health.

Of course if we can ignore climate change, GMOs, dangers of nuclear radiation and other hazards that scientists so inconveniently warn us about, I suppose we can also live with 5G. Or can we?

The pole at 1321 Gilman street is a ten minute walk from where my neighbor Steve and I live. We arrived shortly after midnight. By 1 a.m. a dozen of us had gathered, Phoebe Sorgen, a co-founder of Wireless Radiation Education & Defense ([WiRED](#)), and others, some of whom I knew, some I didn’t. Someone had brought folding chairs, and someone else brought cookies. We sat near the pole chatting, getting to know each other and updating on events.

We wore masks. We remarked that since this spring we’d been living with Covid 19, for the last few weeks with bad air from forest fires, and now the prospect of 5G. This evening the air wasn’t that bad; we looked up and saw the silvery moon. A couple of nights ago the moon had been a frightful deep orange. And of course there’d been that day about a month ago when the sun hadn’t come up.

Hours passed. The street was quiet, very few cars passed, it was just our small group out here by the dark street. Were the antenna installers actually coming? Maybe they’d decided not to.

A large orange kitty cat came by, possibly, it seemed, with intentions of joining our demonstration. Did the kitty share our fear of 5G? Maybe he did. He stayed with us for a while.

More time went by. It was after three o’clock and it didn’t look to us like the installers were coming. Sierra and another person were setting up a tent, they’d be camping next to the pole. Some would be sleeping in their cars. Others left to go home. Steve and I were also about to leave, but just then a construction vehicle drove past, and parked up the street. On the side it read “Modus,” the name of AT&T’s subcontractors.

Two or three more trucks arrived, also parking up the street. One pulled a portable generator. We jumped up, standing close to the pole. Another truck arrived, this one pulling a trailer, parked on the street right beside us. What was this? I wondered. “It’s the fence truck,” someone said. The trailer was loaded with the fences. After a few minutes it drove off, apparently leaving.

The other vehicles remained parked about a block up the street. They didn’t seem to be going anywhere. It looked like this would be another standoff, such as had occurred on several occasions by now. Elizabeth was hurriedly phoning the people who’d left, asking them to return.

Fog was descending on the scene, drifting in to fill up the air, visible in the street lights. I

assumed it was fog, not smoke from the wildfires which so often covers the sky these days.

There were about nine of us now. Nothing seemed to be actually happening at the moment. There weren't any police around.

Another truck arrived, the letters "B A T" on its side. This was said to be traffic control; they put out cones, and block and direct traffic around construction sites.

I glanced at my watch. Four o'clock. Minutes later, three police cars drove up, and at least six police got out. The sergeant in charge walked up to us, and with a disarming smile she said, "Hi Phoebe!"

Phoebe returned the greeting; they knew each other by name from previous events here at this pole. The officer, Sergeant Ronnie Hernandez, told us we had to leave, and said the order came from the city, though she said she didn't know whether from the City Manager (Dee Williams-Ridley), Public Workers Director (Liam Garland), or Supervising Engineer (Ron Nevels). AT&T will reimburse the city for the expenses, she said. That needs to be verified, but if true, the Berkeley Police Department is a rent-a-cop service for corporations. The surprising thing is that they could be so open about it.

Rather than leave, Phoebe and several others sat down on the sidewalk. Sergeant Hernandez gave the word, and two cops, huge musclemen, dragged them away from the pole and across the street. Asking us each our names, it looked like they were going to arrest all of us, though as it turned out they didn't arrest anyone.

Our team near the Monterey Market were treated worse. Cynthia Papermaster told us that two of the officers threatened to take her service dog, Luck-Key, and put him in the pound if she didn't move away from the pole. "One of the threats about Luck-Key was made as the officer was grabbing my arm and twisting it," Cynthia said. "I thought they were going to break my arm. More important than my pain is that we were removed so that a private multibillion dollar company could perform non-essential work in the middle of the night against Berkeley's laws."

Meave O'Connor, also at the Monterey site, has many large bruises on her arms and on one hand that was slammed into the pole. Jason Winnett sustained pulled muscles in his left shoulder and neck. "I had to change this week's work plans in order to rest and rehabilitate," he said. "I was appalled to witness women in their 70s, concerned citizens, who after being up in vigil all night, were being roughly handled by a large number of young, strong police officers."

According to the scientific reports, microwaving from 5G can cause memory loss, so maybe we'll forget all about it.

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This article was originally published on [Daniel's Free Speech Zone](#).

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