



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW

Estimated bills & meter access



How often should meters be read?

An authorised meter reader can enter properties to read the meter without prior consent. A meter reader will attempt to visit every property once every three months. If the meter reader is unable to access the meter, the account will be billed on an 'estimated' meter read.

Estimated bills are issued when actual meter readings cannot be taken from your meter. It is important to understand your rights and responsibilities if you receive a bill based on an estimated meter read.

Estimated bills are usually based on the amount of electricity or gas used in the past. This may be more or less than the amount actually used in the period that was estimated.

After the meter is next read, the bill will be adjusted for any usage above or below the estimate. If the estimated bill is below actual usage, a catch-up bill, also known as a backbill, will be issued. Similarly, if the estimated bill is above actual usage, the next bill may be less than expected.

Who reads the meter?

The meter data provider is responsible for reading the meter and providing meter readings and usage data to retailers so they can bill customers.

Why wasn't my meter read?

Customers have an obligation to provide safe and unhindered access to the meter. However, the most common reason for a meter not being read is because the meter reader couldn't access the meter on the scheduled read date. This may be due to:

- locked or closed gates
- dog/s preventing access
- the meter is located in an inaccessible place, such as inside the property or, for a business, in a shop which is not open when the meter reader visits
- adverse weather events.

If the meter reader is unable to access the meter, your retailer will send you a bill based on an estimated meter read. Some gas meters can be read remotely which means access may not be required. If your electricity meter is not accessible you should ask your retailer about 'smart' or digital meters, which can be read remotely without accessing the meter. If the circumstances preventing access to the meter change – for example, you no longer have a dog or the gate is no longer locked – you need to tell your retailer about the change. It is important that the meter reader has up to date information.

How is an estimated bill calculated?

If your provider has your billing history, the estimate should be based on an average of your previous usage taking into account any seasonal usage pattern. If your provider doesn't have your usage history, for example if you changed retailers or moved in recently, the estimation will be based on the average usage of a comparable customer.

There are industry standards about how estimations are done.

Why do I have estimated reads if I have a digital meter?

Most digital meters in NSW are currently not 'smart meters'. They require the meter reader to attend your property to download the data. Sometimes there are problems when the data is collected, which can result in 'substituted' meter reads. Substituted reads are similar to estimated meter reads. If part of your data is substituted your bill will say that it is estimated, even if most of the bill was based on actual meter read data. When the meter is next read and the remaining actual meter data is then collected, your next bill may be adjusted.

What if I don't want to leave my house unsecured for the meter reader?

A possible solution for electricity meters is to request a distributor lock, sometimes referred to as an e-lock. The meter reader will have a master key that can open all e-locks, but the customer's key can only open their own lock. The e-lock is installed at the customer's expense.

➤ **If your meter reading has been estimated this must be clearly stated on your bill. There may be a statement on the front of your bill advising the bill is 'Estimated' and the word 'Estimated' or the letter 'E' may appear next to the meter readings.**

➤ **If you continue to restrict access to the meter, even after requests for access, your energy retailer can take steps to disconnect your supply.**

Can I provide a self-read?

If you receive an estimated bill, your retailer may agree to accept your own meter reading. This will be considered to be an estimated or 'customer' read. You can discuss providing self-reads with your retailer. Once a year an actual read must still be obtained. This may mean you will need to arrange access.

What is a special meter read?

A special meter read is an actual meter reading taken outside of the usual reading cycle. If you are concerned your bill is high because the estimated read is incorrect, you can ask your retailer for a special meter read. The retailer is permitted to charge customers a special meter read fee for this service.



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* If you are calling from a mobile phone, let us know and we will call you back.

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