

Opening/closing accounts

It's important to open an account when you move in and close it when you move out so you don't end up paying someone else's bill.

You can open or close an electricity or gas account by phone. Usually the company will ask you for your date of birth when you open an account.

How long does it take?

It can take two or three days to connect (or disconnect) supply after you call the company.

Security deposits for energy accounts

If you are a new customer the company may ask you to pay a security deposit. The company may refund the amount after one year of on time payments or when you close the account.

If you are experiencing financial difficulty, ask them if there is a way you can avoid paying the security deposit.

If you are on a pension or benefit and enter a Centrepay arrangement to pay your bill, an energy company can waive the security deposit.

Green energy options

When you open a new electricity account it's likely you'll be offered green energy options. These options usually cost more.

You don't have to take up green energy if you can't afford it. You'll still be supplied electricity.

Disconnection/reconnection

If you don't pay your bills or miss payments, you can end up being disconnected.

Let the company know if you are having problems paying your bills. They may be able to refer you to their customer assistance program or allow you to set up a long term payment plan.

You can't be disconnected if you have an appointment with a community agency about EAPA (Energy Accounts Payment Assistance) vouchers.

Call EWON if you or your family:

- have problems opening an account
- can't work out a payment plan with your company for unpaid bills
- can't find EAPA or PAS vouchers
- have been or are about to be disconnected

Payment plans and customer assistance programs

Most electricity, gas and water companies provide payment plans and customer assistance programs to help people who are having difficulty paying their bills. Contact the company to find out what help they offer and whether you are eligible.

Centrepay

If you are on a pension or benefits, you can ask the company about setting up a Centrepay arrangement to help manage your bills. With Centrepay, you nominate an amount to be deducted from your pension or benefit (minimum of \$10 per fortnight). Centrelink transfers this amount to your energy or water account.

Emergency financial assistance

EAPA (Energy Accounts Payment Assistance) vouchers can help with electricity and gas bills.

PAS (Payment Assistance Scheme) vouchers are available for some water customers.

EAPA and PAS vouchers are distributed by community organisations (eg St Vincent De Paul and Salvation Army).

To be eligible for EAPA or PAS the account needs to be in your name and you will need to bring a recent bill to your appointment to show how much you owe.

Contact your energy or water company for a referral to a community organisation.

If you have trouble locating EAPA or PAS, contact EWON for help.



Tips for resolving complaints

1. If you have any problems with your energy or water company, contact them first and explain your situation. Keep records of letters, names, times and dates.
2. If the call centre staff can't help you, ask to speak to a supervisor.
3. If the problem is not fixed, contact EWON by phone, fax, email, letter or visit www.ewon.com.au to make an online complaint.

About EWON

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) provides an independent way of resolving customer complaints about all electricity and gas suppliers in New South Wales and some water suppliers. Our service is free, fair and independent. Our aim is to keep essential services within reach of everyone.

Contact EWON

FRECALL	1800 246 545* Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm
FREEFAX	1800 812 291
FREEPOST	Reply Paid K1343 Haymarket NSW 1239
INTERPRETER	131 450
TTY/VOICE	133 677
EMAIL	omb@ewon.com.au
WEBSITE	www.ewon.com.au

*Calls from mobile phones may attract a fee, which will vary depending on your service provider. If you are calling from a mobile phone, let us know and EWON will call you back.

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Rebates

NSW energy rebate for pensioners

If you are a pensioner you may be eligible to receive a rebate to help pay your electricity and gas bills. The rebate will appear on your electricity bill. Make sure you provide the company with your pensioner concession number and that your details are entered correctly on their system. If you move house or switch companies, check your bill to make sure the rebate has been applied.

Utilities allowance for pensioners

A federal government allowance to help pensioners meet the costs of regular bills such as electricity, gas and water. This allowance is paid by Centrelink, for more information phone 132 300 or visit www.centrelink.gov.au

Water rebates

Contact your water company to find out about the types of rebates they offer and how to apply. Some companies also offer low-cost services to help customers reduce their water usage.

Life support rebate

If you require certain medical equipment in your home that is necessary to sustain your life, for example a kidney dialysis machine or respirator/ventilator, you may be entitled to a rebate on your electricity bill. Contact your electricity company for more information.

Energy offers and contracts

Many companies offer special rates on electricity, gas or both, if you agree to a contract. With most deals:

- they can charge you a fee if you cancel the contract earlier than the agreed term
- you will need to enter a new contract if you change address (the early termination fee may be waived if you stay with the same company).

Don't agree to anything without reading the contract terms carefully. Ask someone you trust for advice about the offer or ring EWON for more information. Remember, it's okay to say 'no' to a marketer and you don't have to let them into your home.

Energy marketing

If you don't want to be contacted by a particular company about energy offers, you will need to call them and let them know.

To prevent telemarketing calls, you can put your name on the Do Not Call Register, phone 1300 792 958 or visit www.donotcall.gov.au

You can also clearly display a sign at your property stating 'No Marketers'. Marketers must abide by such signs. If you have a sign displayed and an energy marketer visits your home, contact the company immediately or call EWON.

Unpaid bills or debts

If you have unpaid energy or water bills and are contacted by a debt collector, call the Consumer Credit Legal Centre (CCLC) on 1800 808 488 or EWON.

Water charges

If you are moving into public housing, a caravan park or a private unit with its own water meter, you can be asked to pay for the water you use (this should be written in your lease).

Getting someone else to help

You can give permission for someone else to speak to the company to help set up an account or sort out problems with your bills.

What can EWON do to help?

If you can't sort out a problem with your energy or water company, we can help if you have problems:

- opening or closing an account
- with a high bill or disputed account
- with disconnection or reconnection
- negotiating a realistic payment plan or more time to pay your bill
- with an energy contract or switching companies.

Useful contacts

Consumer, Trader & Tenancy Tribunal (CTTT)

www.cttt.nsw.gov.au

☎ 1300 135 399

NSW Government

www.nsw.gov.au

Energy information line

☎ 1300 136 888

Greater Sydney Aboriginal Tenants Service

☎ 1800 772 721

Housing Appeals Committee

www.hac.nsw.gov.au

☎ 1800 629 794

Housing NSW

www.housing.nsw.gov.au

Maintenance

☎ 131 571

General enquiries

☎ 1800 629 212

Office of Fair Trading (OFT)

www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au

Tenancy information

☎ 133 220

Aboriginal tenancy information

☎ 1800 500 330

Tenants' Union of NSW

www.tenants.org.au

☎ 1800 251 101