

Your guide to energy and water issues in NSW



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent



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How to make a complaint



- > Try talking to your energy or water provider to work out the problem
- > If the problem isn't fixed or you're not happy with the response, contact the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON)
- > Contact us by calling **1800 246 545** or by filling in the online complaint form at **ewon.com.au**. You can also **make an appointment to see us in person**.

EWON can help with:



- > High bills and payment difficulties
- > Estimated bills and billing errors
- > Payment plans and access to affordability programs
- > Debt and credit default listing
- > Disconnection or restriction of supply
- > Contracts and issues changing providers
- > Reliability and quality of supply, and more.

EWON can:

- ✓ Ask a senior person at your provider to contact you to resolve the complaint
- ✓ Investigate your complaint
- ✓ Negotiate a fair outcome for you and your provider.



Managing your account

You are responsible for:

- > Opening and closing your energy and water accounts
- > Paying your bills by the due date
- > Providing safe access to the meter.



Keep your provider informed if you don't get a bill, if you can't pay a bill on time or if access to your meter is an issue.

Moving in?

You need to open an electricity account before you move to a new property. You'll also need to open a gas account if there are gas appliances. You should be able to open an account over the phone by calling your preferred provider, but make sure you allow two to three days for your request to be processed.

Moving out?

Before you move out you need to call your provider/s to close your electricity and/or gas accounts. Give them at least three business days' notice so a final meter read can be arranged. If you don't, you may be billed for the next person's usage. It's also a good idea to make a note of the meter readings in case there's an issue after you leave.

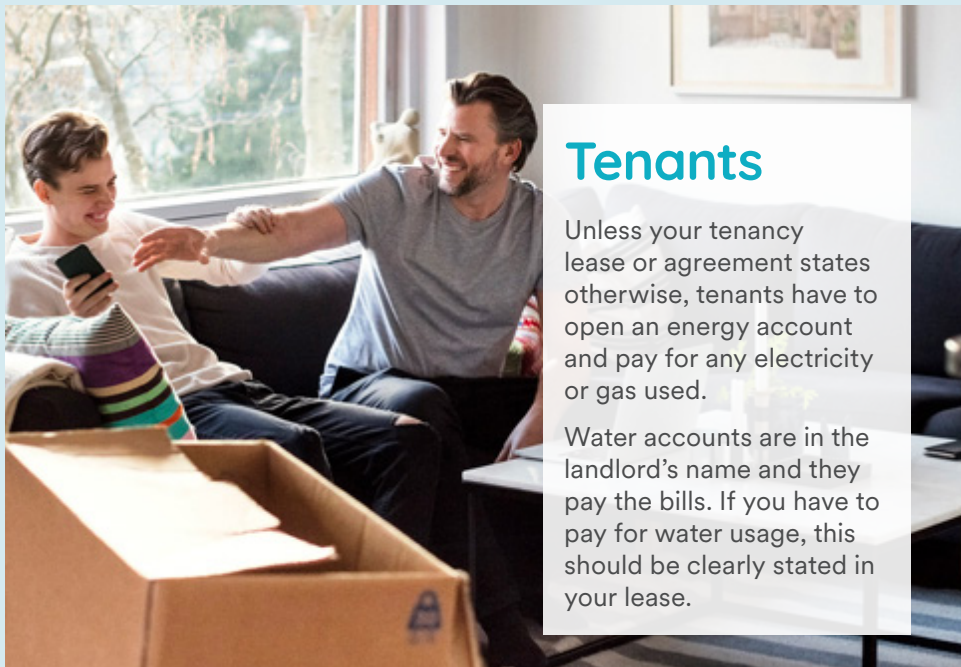
Choosing a provider

To find a provider or compare prices visit energymadeeasy.gov.au or call the Australian Energy Regulator on **1300 585 165**. You can approach providers to discuss offers.

Shop around to find an offer that suits your situation and budget. Take your time – read all the terms and conditions before you agree to anything.

Embedded networks

If you live in an embedded network, you are billed for electricity usage by the owner or manager, who is the exempt seller. Contact the company billing you to find out more.



Tenants

Unless your tenancy lease or agreement states otherwise, tenants have to open an energy account and pay for any electricity or gas used.

Water accounts are in the landlord's name and they pay the bills. If you have to pay for water usage, this should be clearly stated in your lease.

Disconnection and credit listing

Facing disconnection?

Contact your energy provider as soon as possible and ask about:

- > Extensions and payment plans
- > Payment options including customer assistance programs
- > Emergency assistance vouchers (see page 11-12 for more detail).



Contact us if you've had your supply disconnected or you're facing disconnection and need assistance.

Debt collection and credit listing

If your debt remains unpaid your provider may use a debt collector to recover the money.

You may also be credit default listed even if you don't know you have unpaid debt. Credit default listings can affect you later if you apply for a loan, mobile phone contract or mortgage.

Contact us if you have been credit listed. We'll assist you for free. For more information see moneysmart.gov.au

You can't be disconnected if:

You have an appointment with a community agency about Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA).

The debt is less than the required threshold and you have agreed to pay.

You or someone in your house is registered as using life support equipment.

It is a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, a public holiday, any day before a public holiday, before 8am or after 3pm any other day. Between 20 and 31 December (inclusive).

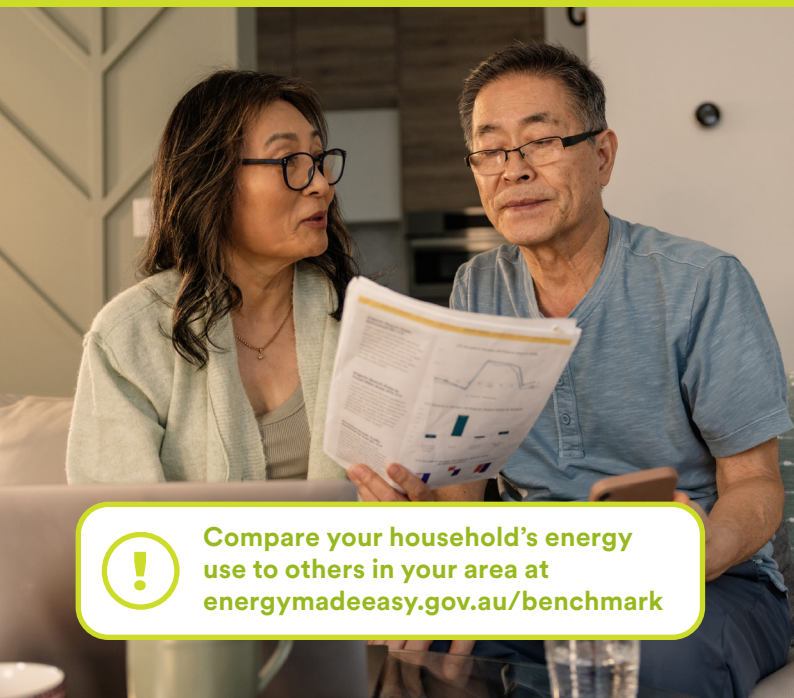
You have a formal complaint, related to the arrears, with your retailer or EWON.



Water



Water can be restricted to allow only a limited flow to the property. It is usually not disconnected because of public health reasons.



Compare your household's energy use to others in your area at energymadeeasy.gov.au/benchmark

Estimated bills and backbilling



You may receive an estimated bill if the meter reader is unable to get an actual read from your meter. Estimated bills are generally based on the amount of electricity or gas you used in the past, which may be more or less than the amount you actually used in the period that was estimated.

After your meter is next read, your bill will be adjusted for any usage above or below the estimate. If the estimated bill is below your actual usage, you will receive a catch-up bill, also known as a backbill. A backbill may also be issued if there was an error in the billing process.

Your provider should offer you extra time to pay a backbill.

If you have any issues with an estimated bill or a backbill, contact your provider and if you're not satisfied with their response, contact us.

High bills

Many factors can lead to your energy or water bill being higher than expected, including:

An estimated meter reading, backbilling or billing errors

Faulty, inefficient or old appliances

A gas or water leak

Guests or a new baby in the household

Seasonal use of appliances like heaters, air conditioners

Moving into a new property

Charges on your bill (e.g. late payment fees or special meter read fees)

A faulty hot water system and thermostat.

Analogue meters



A meter reader normally visits your property every three months and sends the meter data to your provider so they can issue you a bill.

Your provider is required to do their best to have an actual reading carried out at least once a year. If access to your meter is a problem, you could be asked to make an appointment for a special read – you will be charged a fee for this. If access continues to be a problem, your provider can arrange to disconnect the supply. If you receive an account based on an estimated reading, you can ask your provider to adjust the bill by providing your own meter reading.

Smart meters

All new electricity meters installed for residential and small business customers in NSW need to be smart meters. Smart meters can be read remotely and record information about usage at least every half hour. This makes it easier to monitor and make changes to reduce your usage.

Changing providers

Types of offers



Standing offer

All retailers must offer you a standard contract no higher than the default market offer (DMO) price. The DMO is set by the Australian Energy Regulator each year. Contact the retailer to discuss the price, as the DMO rate may be higher than market rates.

Market offer

When you take up a special offer or deal, you enter into a market contract with the provider. These contracts vary between providers and contain various terms and conditions, such as the duration of the contract and fees that may apply.

Energy tariffs

Tariffs set out how you are charged for your electricity. A common structure is to have a price for the energy that passes through your meter combined with a fixed price for service availability.

Smart meters can record what time of day energy is used, so tariffs can be structured with different prices for usage at different times of day, usually related to peak demand periods, ie demand and time of use tariffs. Talk to your retailer about your household energy use, tariffs and how to save on energy costs.

Your retailer must tell you if a better offer is available on your bill under the heading: “Could you save money on another plan?”

If you see this message, ask your retailer to switch you to the better plan.

Ask before you switch



Changing contracts or switching providers may save you money, but to make an informed decision about whether an offer is better for you, you need to know the answers to these questions:

- How do the daily supply (or service) charges and energy usage rate(s) compare?
- What is the contract length and does it roll over? If so, what rate will be charged?
- Which part of the rate is fixed and which is subject to change?
- Which components of the bill do any promised discounts apply to?
- Will your current provider charge an early termination fee if you switch?
- Do the figures quoted include GST?
- Does the new provider charge a fee for ending the contract early or transferring the account if you move? What other fees apply?
- How often will you be billed and what payment options are available?
- Will any rebates or discounts you’re entitled to be paid quarterly, six monthly or annually?

Top tip

Shop around to find the best deal for your circumstances: energymadeeasy.gov.au

Energy and water savings

Reducing your energy and water use can help you save money on your bills and is also good for the environment.

The kitchen



Turn off the second fridge and freezer when you're not using them.

Keep seals around the fridge doors clean and defrost freezers at least twice a year.

Run your dishwasher with a full load on an economy cycle and clean filters regularly.

Don't pour money down the drain – instead of washing dishes under a running tap, turn it off and use a plug.

Boil water in your kettle first then transfer it into a pot for cooking.

Wash vegetables in a bucket or bowl and then recycle the water by using it on your plants.

Bathroom and laundry



Hot or warm washing machine cycles use a lot of extra energy. Wash clothes in cold water to save up to \$124 a year and try to only wash full loads.

If the sun's shining use nature's dryer – hang your clothes outside!

Fix leaking taps and toilets. A dripping tap can waste around 2000 litres per month.

Water heating accounts for about 29% of household energy use. Make sure your hot water system suits your household's size and consumption.

Living areas



Switch to low-energy LED lighting. The bulbs last longer and you'll replace them less often.

Turn off lights that are not being used and use daylight when you can – it's free!

Switch computers and game consoles off at the wall.

Compare products and calculate the cost of running appliances with the Energy Rating calculator at energyrating.gov.au. The more stars, the more savings.

Use fans instead of air conditioning in summer – they are cheap to run, costing just 3-5 cents an hour.

If you use an air conditioner set it to 24-26°C in summer and to 18-21°C in winter. Every degree outside this range can add up to 10% to your heating and cooling costs.

Avoid bill shock by switching the heater off once your space is warm.

Insulate your home then heat! Maintain the temperature with door snakes, curtains and draught-proof strips.

Outdoors



Wash your car at a car wash that recycles water.

Give the hose (and water) a break by using a broom or rake to clean driveways and footpaths.

Use mulch on your garden – without it up to 70% of water is lost due to evaporation.

Consider native plants. These plants are used to our climate and can flourish on very little water. The best times to water are in the morning or evening and remember to water the roots, not the leaves.



Payment assistance

NSW Government rebates

The NSW Government offers a range of energy rebates to eligible customers, including:

Low Income Household Rebate

Family Energy Rebate

Seniors Energy Rebate

Gas Rebate – natural gas and LPG

Medical Energy Rebate

Life Support Rebate

For more information on eligibility and how to apply, contact your provider, the Energy Info Line on **13 77 88** or visit service.nsw.gov.au/campaign/savings-finder

Customer assistance programs

All electricity and gas providers are required to offer a minimum of two payment plans within a 12 month period if you ask, and to operate an affordability program. Some water providers also offer affordability programs.

The programs are designed to help customers stay connected and keep on top of their bills. Contact your provider to see if you're eligible.

If your provider is not willing to offer you an affordable payment plan you can call us for advice or to make a complaint.

No Interest Loans Scheme (NILS)

The NILS helps low income households buy or replace essential household items. Call **1800 509 994** or visit nilsnswfindascheme.org.au for more information about the program.

Payment assistance

The **Energy Accounts Payment Scheme (EAPA)** is available to residential customers who are unable to pay their energy bills because of a crisis or emergency situation.

To access a payment, make an appointment with an organisation that distributes EAPA payments. Visit ewon.com.au and search for EAPA to get a list of all distribution organisations. Once you've made an appointment, let your provider know so you won't have your supply disconnected.

Your water provider may operate a similar scheme. Talk to them about the financial assistance they offer.

The **Essential Medical Equipment Payment** is available to Concession Card holders who require specific medical equipment or heating/cooling. The rebate will be automatically paid each year once an application is accepted, so you will need to reapply if your personal circumstances change.

Find out more at servicesaustralia.gov.au/essential-medical-equipment-payment





Contact EWON for more information or to make a complaint.



Website ewon.com.au

Freecall 1800 246 545

Call to make a face-to-face appointment

Subscribe to our publications: ewon.com.au/subscribe

Tips for resolving complaints

- > If you have a problem with your provider, contact them and explain your situation. Keep records of letters you send, names of staff you talk to, and the times and dates of any contact.
- > If the call centre staff can't help you, ask to speak to a supervisor.
- > If the problem isn't fixed, contact EWON to make a complaint.

You can contact us at any time for independent advice.

We use the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS).
If you need an interpreter, please let us know.

If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment contact us through the National Relay Service. Speak and Listen number: **1300 555 727**
TTY number: **133 677** SMS Relay number: **0423 677 767**

We have a dedicated phone queue for First Nations customers.

EWON acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across New South Wales.
Ngara ngwiya yudi - listen, give, guide



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