

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



1. Try talking to your energy or water provider to work out the problem
2. If the problem isn't fixed or you're not happy with the response, get in touch with the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON)
3. Contact us by calling 1800 246 545, emailing complaints@ewon.com.au, filling in the online form at ewon.com.au or by coming to our office at Level 11, 133 Castlereagh Street, Sydney.

EWON can help with:

- High bills and disputed accounts
- Payment plans and access to hardship programs
- Debt and credit default listing
- Disconnection or restriction of supply
- Marketing, contracts and transfer issues
- Poor customer service
- 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 access to the meter.



Moving in?

You need to open an electricity account when 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 2 to 3 days for your request to be processed.

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 out?

Before you move out you need to call your provider/s to close your electricity and/or gas accounts. If you don't, you may be billed for the next person's usage. It's also a good idea to make a note or take a photo of the meter readings in case there's an issue after you leave.



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.



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.

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 you need assistance.

You can't be disconnected if:

- You have an appointment with a community agency about Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) vouchers
- The debt is less than \$300 and you agreed to pay this amount
- You advised your energy company that someone in your house runs a life support machine
- It is a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, a public holiday, any day before a public holiday, before 8am or after 3pm any other day.

Water

Water is usually not disconnected because of the impact that could have on public health. However, water can be restricted to allow only a very limited flow to the property.

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.



Billing



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.

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.

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

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 and clothes dryers
- 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.

Meter reading

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.

Sometimes your provider will be given an 'estimated read', such as when the meter reader can't access the meter (e.g. due to a locked gate or a dog in the yard). This may be based on your past usage or the usage of similar households.

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.



Switching providers and marketing

Types of offers

Standing offer

All providers must offer you a standard contract at 'standing offer prices'. These prices are set by the providers and can only be changed every six months. Details of a provider's standing offer and notice of any change must be published on their website.



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 marketing

There are rules that marketers must follow when they can approach customers. They must not:

- Remain on your property after you have asked them to leave
- Engage in misleading or deceptive conduct
- Contact you outside the hours of 9am to 6pm weekdays, 9am to 5pm on Saturdays, or anytime on a Sunday or public holiday
- Contact you again within 30 days of you declining an offer
- Contact you again for two years if you ask them to remove your name from their list

Providers must offer a cooling off period - check the details in your contract.

If you feel pressured by a marketer, don't sign or agree to anything.

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 service access charges and energy usage rate(s) compare?
- What is the contract length and does it rollover? 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?
- 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?
- Will your current provider charge an early termination fee if you switch?
- 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?

How to avoid marketers

- Display a sign saying 'No marketers' to stop sales people coming to your door.
- To avoid telemarketers, put your name on the Do Not Call Register by phoning 1300 792 958 or visiting donotcall.gov.au.

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
- 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 1300 136 888 or visit resourcesandenergy.nsw.gov.au.



Payment assistance

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

To access vouchers, make an appointment with a community organisation that distributes EAPA vouchers. Visit ewon.com.au and search for EAPA to get a list of all organisations that distribute vouchers. Once you've made an appointment to get an EAPA voucher, 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.

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 a hardship program. Some water providers also offer hardship 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 50 9994 or visit nilsnswfindascheme.org.au for more information about the program.

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



- Save \$300 a year by turning 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 21% 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 and save 7% on your bill.
- Compare products and calculate the cost of running appliances with the Energy Rating calculator at energyrating.gov.au/calculator. The more stars, the more savings.
- Use fans instead of air conditioning - they are cheap to run, costing just 3-5 cents an hour.
- If you use an air conditioner set it 24-26°C in summer and 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.

Contact EWON

For more information
or to make a complaint,
get in touch with us.



Website ewon.com.au
Email complaints@ewon.com.au
Freecall 1800 246 545
Free Post Reply Paid 86550, Sydney South NSW 1234
In person Level 11, 133 Castlereagh Street, Sydney

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.

To speak to EWON using an interpreter, contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on **131 450**

People who are deaf, hearing impaired or who have a speech impediment can contact EWON through the National Relay Service on **133 677**

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