



Information for electricity, gas and water customers living in NSW

Do you have a problem with your energy or water supplier?

We can help.

What to do if you have a problem

Contact your electricity, gas or water company first and explain your problem. If you need an interpreter, tell the company. Or you can ask a friend or family member to speak to the company for you.

If you telephone the company, keep a record of the person you speak to, as well as the date and time. Keep any letters or documents you receive from the company.

If the call centre staff can't help you, ask to speak to a manager.

If the problem isn't fixed, telephone Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) on Freecall 1800 246 545.

About EWON

EWON helps people in New South Wales who are having problems with their electricity and gas suppliers. We can also help with some water complaints.

EWON's service is free, fair and independent.

We help with problems such as:

- High bills
- Debts and payment difficulties
- Disconnection of electricity, gas or water
- Opening or closing accounts
- Electricity or gas contracts
- Energy marketing
- Poor customer service
- Quality of supply
- Claims for compensation

EWON can arrange for someone from the supplier's specialist dispute resolution team to contact you about your problem or we can investigate your complaint ourselves.

How to contact EWON



Freecall 1800 246 545
Monday to Friday 9am–5pm

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



www.ewon.com.au



Email omb@ewon.com.au



TTY 133 677



Free post Reply Paid 86550
Sydney South NSW 1234



www.facebook.com/ewonsw



www.twitter.com/ewonsw

Interpreter service

If you need an interpreter contact the Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450. Ask TIS to telephone EWON on 1800 246 545.



Managing your energy and water accounts

Opening and closing accounts

It's important to open an electricity account when you move into a new home or your supply may be disconnected. If your home has a gas service you want to use, you will also need to open a gas account. You can choose and switch your electricity and gas company. Visit www.energymadeeasy.gov.au to find the best deal for your household. This website shows you the offers available in your area, compares their costs and links to contact information for the energy companies providing them. You can also call the Energy Made Easy service on 1300 585 165.

You must also close any accounts when you move out so you only pay for the electricity, gas or water you use. You can do this by phone.

Water accounts

If you are moving into a Housing NSW property, a caravan park or a private rental home with its own water meter, you may have to pay for the water you use. Ask your landlord if you have to pay for water.

Paying your bills

Some customers receive bills for energy and water every three months and some receive a bill monthly. If your bill does not arrive, contact the company.

Most companies allow you to pay your bills at the post office, over the phone using your credit card, online or through Centrepay. If you are receiving a Centrelink payment you can choose to have a regular amount paid directly from your payment to your energy or water bill using Centrepay. Phone Centrelink on 131 202 for more information

It is your responsibility to pay your bills on time. If you can't pay a bill, talk to your retailer as soon as possible and get help early.

Estimated bills

Usually you are billed for the energy you have used. This is measured by a meter reader who comes to your home to check the meter. They must read your meter at least once every 12 months.

If there is no meter reading for the billing period, a bill may be estimated, based on your past energy use or on the average usage of a similar customer. It will say on the bill whether the charges are for actual or estimated usage.

If your bill is estimated, you may have been charged too little for your usage and your next actual bill may be higher than you expect. If you have been charged too much, an adjustment will be made to your next bill.

Estimations often occur when meter readers can't access a meter because of a locked gate, a dog, snakes, spiders or wasps. To avoid receiving estimated bills, make sure you provide safe access to your meter. If you don't, you may be asked to make an appointment for a special read and charged a fee.



Case study: Tenant moves out without telling electricity and gas company

[Name] moved out of her rented apartment in August, but didn't advise her gas and electricity company. In November she received a \$485 energy bill for usage at that apartment from June up until November.

[Name] contacted the company to say she had moved out in August and her previous landlord confirmed this with the company. However, the new tenants denied responsibility for the bill on the grounds that their rent, which they paid directly to the landlord, included bills.

[Name] came to EWON for assistance. She considered that she was not responsible for any part of the bill after the date she moved out. We explained to [Name] that a customer may be held responsible for all charges up until the supplier is advised that the customer no longer lives at that address or another customer opens an account for the same address.

We suggested [Name] show some documentation to prove her move-out date to the energy company, which she did. They maintained that [Name] was responsible for the bill, but made an offer to reduce her account by \$219 as a customer service gesture, which she accepted.

Energy marketing

Energy companies use salespeople to sell energy contracts over the telephone, in shopping centres and door to door. If you are approached by an energy marketer, do not sign anything unless you have read and understood the contract. If you're not sure about the offer, ask someone you trust to check it for you. You can also contact EWON if you have questions about a contract.

Help paying bills

If you are having difficulty paying your bills, there is help available. Make sure you contact your company if you are not able to make payment on time and get help early. This can stop your debt getting bigger and keep your supply connected. You can also ask a friend or community worker to talk to the retailer on your behalf. The various types of help available to customers are listed below.



Payment plans

A payment plan is an agreement about how much you will pay and how often. It allows you to pay off a bill or debt over time. By law, energy retailers have to offer payment plans to customers in financial difficulty. Some water retailers also offer payment plans. Contact EWON if you need help negotiating a plan with your supplier.

Rebates

The NSW and Federal governments offer a number of rebates that help eligible customers to pay their energy bills. Tell the company if you receive a government pension as you may be entitled to a rebate. For more information about these rebates and how to apply, ask your energy company, ask Centrelink and visit www.energy.nsw.gov.au.

EAPA and PAS

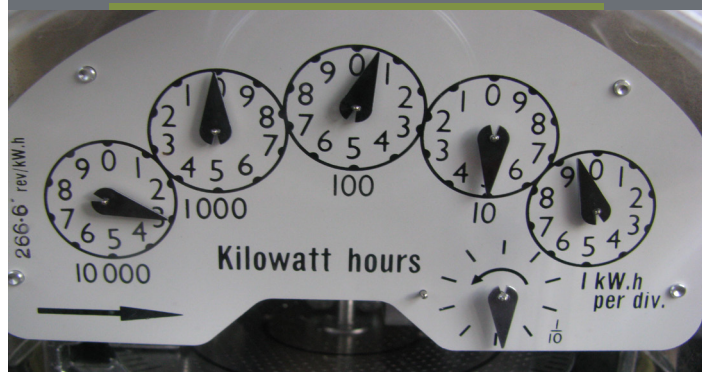
Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) vouchers can help pay electricity and gas bills. Some water suppliers also accept Payment Assistance Scheme (PAS) vouchers to help

Case study: Overestimation results in high bill

[Name] lives alone in a social housing unit with very few appliances. He received an estimated electricity bill for \$908. [Name] has only limited English, so his advocate [Name2], contacted the retailer to dispute the bill because it was more than double his usual bill and he had been away for part of the billing period. The retailer would not revise the estimate, so [Name2] contacted EWON for help. [Name2] told us that [Name] was very distressed about owing that much money. We explained the Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) scheme and [Name2] said he would arrange an appointment.

EWON's investigation showed the retailer had estimated [Name's] bill because the meter was located inside his unit and the meter reader could not gain access to read it. The estimate was based on his usage for the same period in the previous year, but because he was away for much of that time this year, it was in fact an overestimate.

The retailer received actual usage data from the distributor and re-billed [Name] for his use. This reduced his bill to \$506. In the meantime, [Name] obtained EAPA vouchers. Along with the bill reduction, the EAPA assistance meant he was able to pay his account.



pay water bills.

You can go to community welfare agencies like St Vincent de Paul or migrant centres to apply for EAPA or PAS vouchers. Phone EWON if you are not sure which agency has vouchers. The community agency will make an appointment with you to see if you are eligible. Only the account holder can apply for vouchers and they need to bring the bill to show how much is owed.

Hardship programs

Energy retailers are required to offer eligible customers support through their hardship programs. These programs help customers in financial difficulty stay connected and keep on top of their bills. Some water retailers also have hardship programs. Contact your company to see if you are eligible.

If you are having trouble paying your bills, contact your supplier as early as possible to get help and avoid disconnection.

Financial counselling

Financial counselling is a free service offered by many community agencies. A financial counsellor can help you work out how much you can afford to pay towards your account. This information can help you negotiate an affordable payment plan with your retailer. To find a counsellor, phone the Financial Counsellors' Association of NSW on 1300 914 408 or visit www.fcan.com.au.

Unpaid bills and debt collection

If you have unpaid bills and a debt collector (also called a 'mercantile agent') contacts you, call the Credit & Debt Hotline on 1800 808 488 for free advice or contact EWON.

Disconnection

What to do if you have been disconnected

If you have been disconnected, contact your supplier to arrange reconnection. Sometimes disconnections happen by mistake, but if it has happened because you have unpaid bills you may need to come to an agreement with the supplier about payment before they will reconnect your supply. You may also need to pay a reconnection fee. If you are having trouble coming to an agreement, contact EWON for help.

What to do if you are facing disconnection

If you are facing disconnection, get in contact with the company as soon as possible to discuss your situation. If the disconnection is threatened because you have unpaid bills, get help right away so you can avoid having your supply cut off and avoid the additional cost of reconnection fees. You cannot be disconnected if you have an appointment with a financial counsellor or with a community agency about EAPA vouchers, so let your company know if you have an appointment booked.



If you have a problem

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- 2 If the call centre staff can't help you, ask to speak to a manager.
- 3 If the problem isn't fixed, telephone EWON on Freecall 1800 246 545.

Contact EWON



Freecall 1800 246 545

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



www.ewon.com.au



Email omb@ewon.com.au



www.facebook.com/ewonsw



www.twitter.com/ewonsw



Case study: Pensioner faces impending electricity and gas disconnection

When a field officer arrived to disconnect her electricity supply for non-payment, [Name] explained she operates a nebuliser to manage her lung disease and the officer left without completing the disconnection. Her dual fuel account was overdue and she wanted to avoid the gas and electricity being disconnected, so she contacted EWON for help.

[Name] is on a disability pension and her partner had just become employed again. She explained that she couldn't pay the full \$600 she thought was owing on the account upfront, but that she could make a \$200 payment right away and they could then manage to pay \$100 per fortnight to bring down the arrears.

When we spoke with the energy retailer, they advised that there was \$1200 owing on the electricity account and \$305 on the gas account. They agreed to put a hold on the accounts and to accept the payment plan [Name] considered was manageable. They confirmed that [Name] was already receiving the Low Income Household Rebate and agreed to send her an application form for the medical energy rebate, which her circumstances suggested she might also be eligible to receive.

We advised [Name] that she could apply to a community agency for EAPA vouchers to help reduce her arrears and we provided her with referrals to EAPA agents in her area. [Name] said she would take the medical rebate form to her doctor to complete it.