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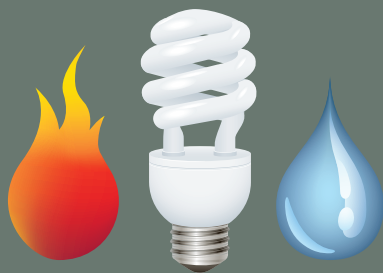
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## About EWON

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.

## Contact EWON

FREECALL	1800 246 545* Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm
FREEFAX	1800 812 291
FREEPOST	Reply Paid 86550 Sydney South NSW 1234
INTERPRETER	131 450
TTY/VOICE	133 677
EMAIL	omb@ewon.com.au
WEBSITE	www.ewon.com.au

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

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## Setting up your account

### Opening your account

While your supply may be connected when you move into a property, you still need to open an account. If you don't open an account, your supply may be cut off.

You can open an account by phone or online, and you may need to provide identification, such as your date of birth or driver licence.

If the supply isn't on, it can take three working days to get connected. Keep this in mind when you plan your move.

Ask the retailer about rebates if you receive a government benefit or you use life support or medical equipment at home.

Do a meter reading when you move in and check this against your first bill.

### Choosing an energy retailer

To find a retailer or compare prices, visit [www.energymadeeasy.gov.au](http://www.energymadeeasy.gov.au) or phone 1300 585 165.

### Security deposit

If you are a new customer, the retailer may ask you to pay a security deposit. The retailer must refund your deposit with interest if you pay your bills on time for one year, or when you close the account.

### Fees and charges

As well as paying for usage, all customers have to pay a service availability charge. Sometimes, and depending on your contract, you may be charged extra fees, for example:

- account establishment fee
- late payment fee
- special meter reading fee
- disconnection fee
- reconnection fee.

When you open an account, ask your retailer about the fees they charge.

### Green energy options

When you open a new energy account, you will be given the option of green energy. If you're not sure what green energy is, ask the retailer to explain the option. Usually, green energy costs more – you don't have to take up this option if you don't want to.

## 'Dear Occupant' letters

If you don't open an account, the retailer will send bills or letters addressed to 'Dear Occupant' asking you to contact them or open an account. You should read these letters if they are sent to your property. They may be a disconnection warning and ignoring them may lead to your supply being cut off.

## Managing your account

### ① Your responsibilities

As a customer, you are responsible for:

- opening/closing your account
- paying your bills by the due date
- providing access to the meter.

Contact your retailer if you don't get a bill, if you can't pay your bill on time, or if meter access is an issue.

### Closing your account

You should contact your retailer when you move out and give a forwarding address. The retailer will arrange for a final meter reading and issue a final bill. When you move out, do a meter reading and check this against your final bill.

If you don't close your account when you move out, you may be charged for the next occupant's usage.

If you do not receive a final bill within a few weeks, contact the retailer again. Keep a receipt of your final payment in case a dispute arises.

If you are on a market contract, the retailer may charge you a fee for closing your account or transferring it to another property.

### Debt collection

If you don't pay a bill, the retailer may start debt recovery action. This can result in a default listing on your credit report that will stay on your record for five years and may affect your ability to get finance. For advice on debt collection phone the Credit & Debt Hotline on 1800 808 488 or visit [www.cclcnsw.org.au](http://www.cclcnsw.org.au). If you think your retailer has unfairly applied a default listing, contact EWON.

## Information for tenants

When an account is in your name, you are responsible for the bills. If the account is in more than one name, each person can be held responsible. If you're living in a sharehouse, make sure everyone agrees on who will pay the bills.

**Energy:** If you have a standard Residential Tenancy Agreement, you will have to pay for any electricity or gas used, and you will have to open the accounts.

If your lease states that electricity or gas usage is included in your rent, the landlord has to open an account and pay the bills. The landlord can only charge you for usage if the property is separately metered.

If a property has gas connected but there are no gas appliances provided for or used by a tenant, the landlord must pay the service availability charge.

**Water:** Generally, a water account will be in the landlord's name and they pay the bills. A landlord can only charge you for water usage if the property is separately metered. For tenancies starting after 31 January 2011, the landlord can only charge for water usage if they have installed water efficiency measures.

If you have to pay for water usage, this should be clearly stated in your lease. Make a note of the meter reading on your Condition Report when you move in or out.

If you live in public housing, you will have to pay for water usage. For information phone Housing NSW on 1300 468 746.

### Landlord/tenant disputes

If your landlord doesn't pay a utility bill or you have a dispute with them over a high bill, phone NSW Fair Trading on 133 220 or a Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service (visit [www.tenants.org.au](http://www.tenants.org.au) to find your local service).

Public housing tenants can contact the Housing Appeals Committee on phone 1800 629 794 or the NSW Ombudsman on 1800 451 524.

## Customer assistance

If you can't pay a bill, talk to your retailer as soon as you can. 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.

### Payment plans

By law, energy retailers have to offer payment plans to customers who need time to pay the bill. Some water retailers also offer instalment plans to customers. If you can't agree with the retailer about how much you can afford to pay, contact EWON.

### Customer hardship programs

All energy retailers are required to have a hardship charter to help customers in financial difficulty. As part of the charter, most retailers have

set up special hardship programs. These programs help customers stay connected and keep on top of their bills. Some water retailers also have hardship programs.

Each retailer has their own eligibility criteria. Contact your retailer to see if you are eligible.

### Advice on saving money on your bills

Ask your retailer about ways you can reduce your usage. Some retailers offer free energy or water audits. You can also find tips on easy ways to save energy and water in our *Getting High Bills* factsheet and on our website [www.ewon.com.au](http://www.ewon.com.au).

### Centrepay

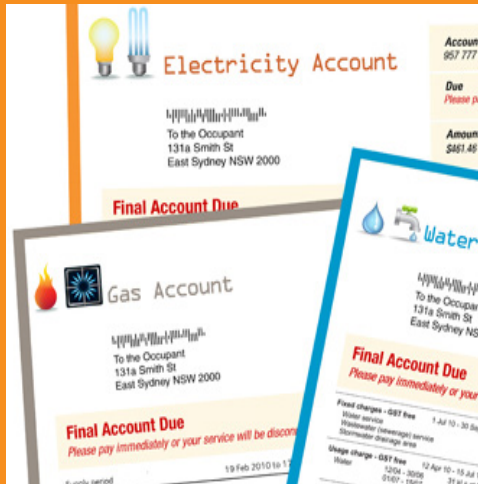
All energy retailers and some water retailers offer Centrepay to Centrelink customers. With Centrepay, an amount is deducted from your pension or benefit each fortnight (minimum of \$10). Centrelink transfers this amount to your energy account. When you make a fortnightly payment, you still receive a quarterly bill, but only for any amount still owing on your account. Contact Centrelink on 132 300 or your retailer for more information.

### Financial counsellors

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](http://www.fcan.com.au).

### No Interest Loan Schemes (NILS)

Low income customers can apply for NILS to help purchase or replace household items such as a fridge or washing machine. NILS is offered by some community agencies in NSW. To find an agency phone 1800 509 994 or visit [www.nilsnsw.org.au](http://www.nilsnsw.org.au).



If you can't sort out an affordable payment plan with your retailer, contact EWON on freecall 1800 246 545.

## Rebates

### NSW Government Rebates

The NSW Government offers energy rebates to eligible customers, these include:

- Low Income Household Rebate
- Family Energy Rebate
- Gas Rebate
- Medical Energy Rebate
- Life Support Rebate

Contact your retailer, the Energy Info Line on 1300 136 888, or visit [www.resourcesandenergy.nsw.gov.au](http://www.resourcesandenergy.nsw.gov.au)

### Federal Government assistance

The Federal Government provides assistance to eligible customers, including:

- a utilities allowance to help pensioners pay utilities bills
- Essential Medical Equipment Payment, paid annually

For information phone Centrelink on 132 300.

### Water rebates

Rebates and customer assistance programs vary between water retailers. Ask your retailer what they offer and how to apply.

### Emergency assistance EAPA vouchers for energy

The Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) voucher program is designed to help people who are having trouble paying their home electricity and/or gas bill because of a crisis or emergency situation. EAPA can't be used for some fees or if it will put your account in credit.

The EAPA program is administered by the NSW Government. Vouchers are distributed by community agencies such as Anglicare, St Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army and Wesley Mission.

You will need to make an appointment with the agency so they can assess your eligibility. Make sure you bring your bill with you. The worker may ask you about your income and expenses. To receive EAPA, the account will need to be in your name.

There may be a waiting period for an appointment. Once you have

an appointment, let your retailer know so they can put a hold on any disconnection action.

Check with your retailer about how to make a payment using EAPA. If the retailer accepts payments at the post office, take your bill with the barcode portion intact. Keep your receipt to prove you paid the bill. To find a community agency that distributes EAPA, call the Energy Info Line on 1300 136 888, contact your retailer or call EWON.

### PAS vouchers for water

Some water retailers offer a Payment Assistance Scheme (PAS) to help customers in hardship pay for water usage. PAS can be in the form of vouchers or a credit to your account and is available through community agencies. Contact your retailer or EWON to find an agency in your area.

## Energy disconnection

Before cutting off your supply, the retailer must:

- send you at least two written notices (a reminder and a warning) issued at least one week apart
- make reasonable attempts to contact you either by phone or in person
- propose a payment plan as an alternative to disconnection. The plan must take into account your ability to pay, what you owe and your usage.

If you are a customer in hardship, the retailer must make two payment plan offers over a 12 month period.

If you are late in paying and the retailer sends a reminder or warning notice for two bills in a row, you may be disconnected with fewer notices. This does not apply if you are participating in the retailer's hardship program.

### When can't they disconnect?

Your electricity or gas supply can't be disconnected if:

- you have an EAPA appointment
- if the debt is for less than \$300, so long as you have agreed with the retailer to pay this amount.

- someone in your house runs a life support machine. Your energy retailer must have this noted in your account details
- it is a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, a public holiday, any day before a public holiday, or before 8am or after 3pm any other day

### When can they disconnect?

Your electricity or gas supply can be disconnected when:

- you don't contact the retailer to open an account or to pay for energy you've used
- you don't pay an overdue amount
- you don't agree to any of the retailer's payment plan offers
- you don't keep to your payment plan, you miss a payment, or your payment is late
- your payment plan is cancelled
- you don't keep in contact with the retailer (for example, you don't let them know you have an EAPA appointment or that you've made a payment)
- you haven't paid a security deposit
- your supply installation is unsafe.

## Facing disconnection?

Disconnection will add to your debt, so if you receive a final notice ask your retailer about:

- an extension or payment options
- their customer assistance program
- emergency assistance vouchers.

If you can't come to an agreement with your retailer, contact EWON.

### How they disconnect supply

The retailer will issue an order to the network distributor, who will send a field officer to disconnect your supply at the meter box. The field officer will usually place a sticker over the main switch. If you remove the sticker to reconnect your supply, this is considered an offence.

If the retailer identifies illegal usage at a property, they may arrange for a pole top disconnection.

## Water restriction

Water retailers don't usually disconnect supply, but they can severely reduce it so that a restricted flow comes out of your taps. Most water retailers will send more than one written notice and try to contact you, before restricting supply.

If you can't pay your water bill or your landlord fails to pay a bill, contact your retailer.

## Facing disconnection?

Disconnection will add to your debt, so if you receive a final notice ask your retailer about:

- an extension or payment options
- their customer assistance program
- emergency assistance vouchers.

If you can't come to an agreement with your retailer, contact EWON.

## Getting reconnected

Normally, you have to make a payment or agree to a payment plan to get reconnected. You can also seek emergency assistance (EAPA or PAS) to help pay your debt.

If you make a payment, keep a receipt as proof. Let your retailer or EWON know that you've made a payment, so reconnection can be scheduled. Where possible, the retailer will try to reconnect on the same day.

If you can't get reconnected, contact EWON for help.

### Reconnection fees

You may have to pay a fee that covers disconnection and reconnection. These fees are set by the Australian

Energy Regulator and not by the retailers. You may be charged extra for reconnection after 3pm weekdays (after hours) or if you have been disconnected at the pole rather than the meter box.

If they have cut off your supply by mistake, or they haven't followed the correct procedure, they can't charge you a fee.

### ① Safety during disconnection:

- For safety, turn off and unplug your appliances before your electricity or gas is reconnected
- Be careful using candles or kerosene, especially around children
- Keep the fridge door closed so food will keep longer

## If your bill seems wrong

If you think there is a problem with your bill, for example a rebate hasn't been applied or it is unexpectedly high, contact your retailer first. Tell them your concerns and ask them to explain the charges on the bill.

If they can't explain the bill to you straight away they may offer (or you can ask them) to do a full investigation.

### Not satisfied with the result?

Contact EWON for help. We can conduct our own investigation into the accuracy of your bill. If we don't find anything wrong, we will explain how we reached our decision. We can also assist you to negotiate a payment plan with the retailer so you can pay the bill over time.

## Keep making payments

Billing investigations may take time to resolve, so try to pay the part of the bill not in dispute. That is, pay your regular quarterly amount. This will help you stay on top of your bills and show the retailer you are acting in good faith. For example, if your bill is usually \$380 and the high bill is \$750, you could pay \$380 while the retailer or EWON conducts an investigation.

## How can EWON help?

EWON can help if you have:

- problems with opening, closing or transferring an account
- a dispute with your retailer over a high bill.

If you can't pay your bill, we can:

- try and get you more time to pay
- help you negotiate an affordable payment plan
- refer you to agencies that distribute EAPA or PAS
- ask the retailer to put a hold on the disconnection while you locate financial assistance
- give you information on financial assistance and how to save money on your bills.

If your supply has been cut off, we will check that the disconnection was lawful, and try to get you reconnected.

Contact EWON on **1800 246 545** or visit [www.ewon.com.au](http://www.ewon.com.au). If you are calling from a mobile phone, let us know and we'll call you back.

## Tips for resolving complaints

**1** If you have a problem with your supplier, 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 isn't fixed, contact **EWON on freecall 1800 246 545** or visit [www.ewon.com.au](http://www.ewon.com.au) to make a complaint.