

Energy bills: a guide for business customers



What is the definition of a micro-business?

The Consumers, Estate Agents and Redress Act (1 December 2011) defines a micro-business as one which:

- uses less than 200,000 kWh of gas or 55,000 kWh of electricity a year, or
- has less than ten employees (or their full-time equivalent) and an annual turnover total not exceeding €2m.

Gas and electricity suppliers know that energy bills going back months or even years, known as back-bills, can be a concern for customers. That's why Energy UK and the Industrial & Commercial Shippers and Suppliers Association (ICoSS), who between them represent most of the companies supplying energy to small businesses, have worked together to produce this guide setting out how micro-businesses can avoid back-billing.

Both the customer and the supplier have responsibilities with regards to billing. But where a micro-business customer has taken all reasonable steps to avoid the need for back-billing, suppliers have committed to limit any back-bill to three years for electricity bills, and to four to five years for a gas bill. This is a baseline commitment and in many cases suppliers have voluntarily gone beyond this to offer greater protection to their micro-business customers.

Your micro-business responsibilities

Customers should pay for energy they have used and have an obligation to help their supplier with obtaining meter readings and resolving queries.

1. Moving into new premises

- Find out straight away who the energy supplier is. The Energy UK website (www.energy-uk.org.uk) gives advice on identifying your supplier.
- Provide the supplier with recent meter readings and updated contact details.
- To find a good deal, phone the energy supplier to find out what they can offer or look at their website. You can also look at other suppliers' websites or use one of the accredited price comparison websites.

2. Moving out

Give your energy supplier a final meter reading to ensure your business is only billed for the energy used. Keep a note of this final reading.

3. Meter readings

Provide access to meters and provide regular readings. Energy suppliers must take all reasonable steps to read meters at least every two years but where possible will aim to read meters more often.

4. Paying too much or too little?

- If an energy bill seems too high or too low, call your energy supplier for advice. They may change future payments, issue a refund or give advice on saving energy. They may also be able to set up regular repayments to help manage large bills.
- Check with the supplier how often energy bills can be expected, and contact them if they are not arriving regularly.

5. Making a complaint

- Suppliers can get it wrong. If a complaint can't be resolved through discussions with your energy supplier, contact Citizens Advice Bureau (www.adviceguide.org.uk) for advice before contacting the Energy Ombudsman (www.ombudsman-services.org).
- Even if part of a bill is disputed, continue to pay for the undisputed elements of the bill.

Energy suppliers' commitments

Energy suppliers also have legal obligations to their business customers to make sure bills are accurate.

1. Meter readings

- Energy suppliers will take all reasonable steps to read meters at least every two years and where possible will aim to read meters more frequently.
- Whether it's online, over the phone or by post, your supplier will provide information on how you can submit meter readings.

2. Accurate bills

- Suppliers can provide you with information on how to understand your bill, and what to do if you believe your bill is wrong.
- When an accurate meter reading is agreed your supplier will reflect this in the next bill issued.

3. Payment options

If a back-bill is sent, your supplier will make all payment options clear to you. If the bill might place the business in financial difficulty, the energy supplier will actively encourage you to seek free debt advice from organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau (www.adviceguide.org.uk) and the Business Debtline (www.bdl.org.uk).

4. Putting the customer first

- The supplier will take into account business circumstances when dealing with any back-bill and can offer help such as setting up a repayment plan.
- If a supplier discovers wrong payments are being made, they will let the customer know and will seek to correct it. This will include, where appropriate and possible, contacting a customer prior to issuing a back-bill.

5. Resolving complaints

Your energy supplier will make every effort to resolve any issue within eight weeks. If after eight weeks, the issue remains unresolved, the supplier must inform you about the independent, free Energy Ombudsman.

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BES Commercial Gas and
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Gazprom

Good Energy

Haven Power

npower

Opus Energy

ScottishPower

SSE

Total Gas and Power

Utility Warehouse

Useful contact details:

Business Debtline – advice for small businesses

0800 197 6026 or www.bdl.org.uk

Citizens Advice consumer service

08454 04 05 06 or www.adviceguide.org.uk

The Ombudsman Services: Energy

0330 440 1624 or 01925 530263

Email: enquiries@os-energy.org

www.ombudsman-services.org/energy.html

www.energy-uk.org.uk

www.icoss.org



The trade association
for the energy industry