

Code of practice for accurate bills scenarios

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Introduction

The code of practice for accurate bills (the billing code) represents a series of voluntary commitments which has been developed to go beyond the supplier licence conditions and applies to domestic customers only.

As of 1 May 2018, the 12 month back-billing rule, where a supplier is at fault (previously clause 5) has become a supplier license condition and is therefore no longer a part of the billing code. Energy UK is currently assessing potential new areas of focus for the code to ensure it is fully up to date.

The billing code aims to drive improved standards of performance and to provide a common framework around which energy suppliers can build better processes and controls for billing their customers. This is important, particularly as over 200 million energy bills are sent to customers every year. The six members of the billing code – British Gas (including Scottish Gas), E.ON, EDF Energy, npower, ScottishPower and SSE – recognise that better, clearer information is needed to gain customers' trust.

Members of the billing code are now independently and thoroughly audited every year against four commitment areas – switching, meter readings, energy bills and statements, payments and refunds.

The billing code scenarios are a collection of frequently asked questions which many customers have about their energy bills and the billing code. We have developed the scenarios with input from the members of the billing code. The scenarios are designed to explain the specific areas covered by the billing code.

Support for vulnerable customers

As well as the billing code, all energy suppliers provide a significant amount of help and support for vulnerable customers. Find more information here: www.energy-uk.org.uk/customers/help-with-your-energy-bills.

The six largest energy suppliers (British Gas, E.ON, EDF Energy, npower, ScottishPower and SSE) have voluntarily agreed to follow a set of principles known as the safety net for vulnerable customers. Under the safety net, members have pledged to never knowingly disconnect a vulnerable customer at any time of year, where for reasons of age, health, disability or severe financial insecurity, they cannot protect their personal welfare or the welfare of other members of the household. Find more information here: www.energy-uk.org.uk/policy/disconnection.

Advice and enquiries about your bill

Citizens Advice gives information and practical advice on energy and issues. Their website is: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply/

There is also an interactive tool on the Citizens Advice website which provides an explanation of the different parts of your gas or electricity bill. Find more information here: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply/problems-with-your-energy-bill/understand-your-energy-bill/

Complaints and disputes

If you are unhappy with the way you have been treated or you want to dispute your bill, please contact your supplier first. When contacting them, make sure you have details of meter readings, and any relevant information from your bill, so that your query can be dealt with more easily. Suppliers have set a time limit of eight weeks to deal with any complaints, but many are settled more quickly.

There is more information on how to make a complaint about your supplier on the Energy UK website: www.energy-uk.org.uk/customers/how-to-make-a-complaint.

1. Switching

Scenario	What the supplier and you can do to help
1. I've just moved in and I am not sure who the current supplier or suppliers are?	<p>The supplier (or suppliers) will be the same ones that the previous occupants were using. Ask the previous occupiers or the landlord, or look on the Energy UK website for help on finding out who your supplier is.</p> <p>Find more information here: www.energy-uk.org.uk/customers/how-to-switch-energy-company/find-out-who-your-energy-supplier-is.</p> <p>Take a note of the meter readings when you move in and provide them when you let the supplier know you have moved in. If you have recently moved into the property, it is important to open post addressed to the occupier as your supplier (or suppliers) may not know your name.</p>
2. I'm moving out, what should I do?	<p>You must contact your supplier as soon as you reasonably can before your leaving date and tell them you are leaving the property. This applies to both credit and prepayment meters. Make sure you take an accurate note of the meter readings as you will be responsible for the energy used up until these readings and a final bill will be produced.</p>
3. I haven't received my final bill.	<p>If you have not received your final bill or a letter or call asking for more information, please call your supplier to make sure they have your correct forwarding address and contact details. Your supplier must take all reasonable steps to send your final bill or statement of accounts within six weeks (in other words, 30 working days).</p>
4. I have recently switched supplier, how long will it take for the change to takeplace?	<p>It will usually take less than three weeks for the switching process to complete and for the change to take place, unless you have reached a different agreement with your new supplier. Your new supplier will give you details of the date when the change will take place.</p>
5. What is the Energy Switch Guarantee?	<p>The Energy Switch Guarantee is a voluntary commitment that promises a simple, speedy and safe switch from one energy supplier to another. The guarantee is a set of 10 commitments developed by energy suppliers. Find more information, including a list of suppliers who have signed up to the guarantee, here: www.energyswitchguarantee.com</p>

2. Meter reading

Scenario	What the supplier and you can do to help
1. How can I give my supplier a meter reading?	Your supplier will have a number of ways to give a reading including by phone or online.
2. I am never in when the meter reader comes round.	If your supplier cannot access your meter, the meter reader will leave a card explaining how to provide your own reading. If you cannot read your meter, let your supplier know.

3. Energy bills and statements

Scenario	What the supplier and you can do to help
1. How can I check that the charges on my bill are correct?	<p>Your supplier will have measures in place to make sure that your energy bill or statement has been worked out accurately based on your current tariff. Your charges will be clearly shown on your bill or statement. If you are concerned that the charges are not correct, you should contact your supplier.</p> <p>Remember there are significant changes in energy usage between summer and winter, which can result in your bills being higher than expected as can a change in your circumstances. Check that the details on your bill are the same as the details on your meters and that you have accurate meter readings. If you are still concerned, contact your supplier.</p>
2. My supplier has changed their prices. How will they work out how much energy I used before and after the price changed?	<p>Your supplier uses a range of information such as the typical amount of energy you have used in the past to work out your energy use before and after a price change.</p>
3. How do I work out if my bill was based on estimated or actual meter readings?	<p>Usually, estimated readings have an 'E' or will say 'estimate' on the bill. Actual readings are shown by an 'A' on the bill. Customer readings have a 'C' on the bill. Or, suppliers may use different wording to highlight if your bill is based on estimated or actual meter readings. For example 'we read your meter', 'estimated meter read', 'you gave us your meter reading' or 'smart meter reading'.</p>
4. My supplier has sent me an estimated bill. What should I do?	<p>Check that the estimated meter reading (or readings) used to bill you is close to your actual readings, and if you want to update your readings, contact your supplier direct.</p>

3. Energy bills and statements (continued)

Scenario	What the supplier and you can do to help
5. How often will I receive an energy bill?	You will receive your energy bill or statement at regular intervals depending on how you pay for your energy. You can contact your supplier if you want to know more details about how often you will receive a bill or statement.
6. I have a letter explaining my bill date is going to change – do I need to do anything?	No, you will rarely need to do anything as a result of your billing date changing. If any action is needed, your supplier will tell you.
7. I have received an unusually high bill. What should I do?	<p>There are many reasons why your bill is higher than expected. This could be due to a change of use, or your supplier receiving actual readings which are higher than their previous estimated readings.</p> <p>Remember there are significant changes in energy usage between summer and winter, which can result in your bills being higher than expected as can a change in your circumstances. Check that the details on your bill are the same as the details on your meters and that you have accurate meter readings. If you are still concerned, contact your supplier.</p>
8. I have given my supplier a reading. Should I expect a bill?	Not all meter readings are used to prepare a bill. Bills are produced in line with the billing schedule you have agreed with your supplier. It's best to provide a meter reading when asked for one by your supplier as this is usually when a bill is being prepared. All valid readings, even if they are not used for billing will be used to improve the accuracy of estimated or future bills (or both).

4. Payments and refunds

Scenario	What the supplier and you can do to help
1. My regular payment amount or Direct Debit amount has changed. Why?	There are many reasons why your payments change, such as a price rise, change in use, or receiving actual readings which are not in line with previous estimates. Your supplier reviews your account at least once every 12 months to ensure your payments cover your energy use. If you have provided a recent actual meter reading, your Direct Debit arrangement will be reviewed within the following six months.
2. I have received a final bill from my old supplier which shows that I am in credit. Will I receive a refund?	If the meter reading on the final bill is an actual meter reading, you are due a refund of the credit balance. Your old supplier will normally pay the refund within 10 working days but you need to make sure they have either your bank account details or your name and a forwarding address.
3. I am having difficulty paying my bills.	You must contact your supplier immediately if you are having problems paying your bills. They will be able to discuss your circumstances and offer the most appropriate payment plan for you.
4. I have been using the previous occupiers prepayment key or card as a new one has not arrived.	You must contact your supplier immediately who will send you the correct key or card for your meter (free of charge). By using this key or card, it will make sure your meter continues to be updated.

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