

ENERGY
RETAIL
Association



Code of Practice for
Accurate Bills

Contents

Introduction	2
Joining, Leaving or Moving	3
Meter Readings	4
Receiving your energy bill	5
Paying your bill	7
Back Billing	8
Support for Vulnerable customers	9
Advice, Enquiries, Complaints and Disputes	10
Dispute Resolution Service	11
Terms and definitions	12

Introduction

This Code of Practice outlines the key commitments given by your energy supplier to provide accurate bills as well as your obligations as an energy customer. The Membership of the Code currently includes British Gas (including Scottish Gas), EDF Energy, E.ON, npower and Scottish Power. These member companies have agreed to abide by the Code and be governed by the Code membership rules. The main reason for publishing this Code is to assure customers of the suppliers' commitment to high standards that provide:

- Clear, accurate, informative and timely bills and statements.
- Support and advice for those having difficulty paying their bills.

1

Joining, Leaving or Moving

Suppliers will work with customers to make sure accurate information is recorded and transfers between suppliers are smooth.

- 1.1 If you are moving home you need to notify your supplier(s) and provide them with your energy meter readings.
- 1.2 Suppliers shall ensure that when you open a new account or close your account following a change of supplier, the old supplier and new supplier will agree the meter reading for the time of transfer.
- 1.3 Your supplier will provide a final bill within 30 working days of the supply end date. Where this is not possible the supplier will provide you with an explanation as to why the bill has not been issued.

2 Meter Readings

Suppliers will offer a range of options to make sure that they obtain and record the most up to date and accurate meter reading.

- 2.1 Your supplier will attempt to read your meter on a regular basis, at least every two years as a minimum.
- 2.2 If it is not possible for your supplier to gain access to read your meter, your supplier will explain how you can provide your own reading.
- 2.3 Where a valid read has been obtained this will be used to improve the accuracy of your bill/statement.
- 2.4 It is important to check the accuracy of your meter readings. Suppliers will provide information to help you understand the importance of the meter reading process.

3 Receiving your energy bill

Suppliers will use all available information to produce accurate, clear and timely bills.

- 3.1 Your energy bill and/or statement will, list the energy you have used and the suppliers charges, in a simple format so that you could calculate your own bill. It will be clear if the supplier is billing you for gas, electricity or other products and services.
- 3.2 If your supplier does not have an actual or customer reading they will send a bill based on the amount of energy you have historically used, or based on average amount of energy used for a similar type of property.
- 3.3 Your supplier shall make it clear on the bill whether an actual, customer or estimated reading has been used to calculate the amount owed.
- 3.4 Your supplier will make it clear when you have received more than one consecutive estimated bill.

- 3.5 Your energy bill and/or statement will cover an agreed regular period and will be sent out promptly. You will be informed of any major change to the future planned billing dates.
- 3.6 Where your supplier increases their prices or reduces their concessions (or discounts) this will be clearly communicated to you, using your bill, statement or other form of written communication.
- 3.7 Your supplier has processes in place to ensure that unusually high or low bills are checked before they are sent out.
- 3.8 If you receive an estimated bill your supplier will ask you to check that the estimate is close to the reading on the meter and to provide your own reading if the estimate is inaccurate.
- 3.9 If you provide a valid read it will be used to produce a revised bill/statement, if appropriate. This will be sent out within 10 working days.

4 Paying your bill

Suppliers will offer a range of payment options which they will clearly communicate to the customer.

- 4.1 If you are a direct debit customer your supplier will take all reasonable steps to ensure your payments are set at the right level. This includes reviewing your account proactively to make sure your payments are sufficient to cover your energy usage.
- 4.2 In the event of money being owed to a customer, your supplier will refund that amount in accordance with the customer's particular product/payment plan.
- 4.3 Your supplier will take into account any known circumstances, which may affect your ability to pay an outstanding bill, when arranging a repayment plan.
- 4.4 Your supplier will take all reasonable steps to reset your prepayment meter within a reasonable period of time.

5 Back Billing

Suppliers have signed on to the Back Billing Principles. Each and every back billing case will be assessed on an individual basis by your supplier.

- 5.1 If your supplier is at fault, they will not seek additional payment for unbilled energy accrued more than one year prior to the bill being issued.
- 5.2 The back billing clause is not intended as a means for avoiding payment. You as a customer should pay for energy used and have an obligation to assist your supplier by co-operating with attempts to obtain meter readings or resolve queries from your supplier.

6 Support for Vulnerable customers

Suppliers shall provide help to customers who require assistance.

- 6.1 Your supplier shall provide access to services specifically for priority service group customers and they will also explain the benefits of being on the Priority Services Register.
- 6.2 Your supplier will provide information to eligible customers about the special arrangements they have in place to help those who are of pensionable age or disabled or chronically sick, such as password schemes and large print or audio bills.
- 6.3 Suppliers will not knowingly disconnect a customer at any time of year that they identify as being in the category of a Vulnerable customer.
- 6.4 If a customer that has been disconnected is subsequently identified as being vulnerable, the supplier will make reasonable endeavours to reconnect the customer within 24 hours (on working days) where safe to do so.

7 Advice, Enquiries, Complaints and Disputes

Suppliers will provide advice and information to customers to help them better understand their energy bills. Suppliers will advise customers of their complaints procedure and the dispute resolution service.

- 7.1 Suppliers will provide information and advice on the products, services and payment methods they have available to make sure you are able to make an informed choice.
- 7.1 If you receive a bill/statement that you do not understand or you wish to query, you should contact your supplier, who will, provide an explanation or if necessary or appropriate, reissue the bill.
- 7.3 Suppliers will aim to resolve any issues the customer raises to their satisfaction, reviewing the individual circumstances of each complaint.

Dispute Resolution Service

- 7.4 This Code operates in association with the Energy Ombudsman. The Energy Ombudsman is the independent body that resolves disputes between a customer and their energy supplier associated with billing and transfer issues. Ombudsmen are an independent and impartial means of resolving disputes outside the courts. The decision of the Ombudsman shall be regarded as binding on the supplier.
- 7.5 If you have a complaint with your supplier you should first try to resolve the issue with the supplier. If you cannot resolve a dispute with the supplier a deadlock letter will be issued and you will then be given access to the Energy Ombudsman.
- 7.6 The criteria below have been identified which need to be met before a customer complaint is considered to have reached 'deadlock' and the customer will be given access to the Energy Ombudsman Scheme.
This is when a customers' complaint has got to the position where:
 - a there is no new information to be gained on the complaint from either the customer or the supplier;
 - b the complaint escalation processes have been followed;
 - c the customer and the supplier still cannot agree to a resolution within the supplier's complaint procedures; and
 - d having more time will not improve this position.

Terms and definitions

Bill	Documentation issued by the supplier to a customer notifying charges due to be paid and payments received against this account.
Back Billing	From 1 July 2007, where your supplier is at fault, they will not seek additional payment for unbilled energy accrued more than one year prior to the bill being issued.
Domestic Customer	A domestic premise is a premises at which a supply of gas or electricity is taken wholly or mainly for a domestic purpose except where that premise is a non domestic premise.
ERA	The Energy Retail Association.
Priority Service Register (PSR)	Register of customers who are of pensionable age, have sight or hearing difficulties, disabled or chronically ill.
Statement	A document issued to a customer that details their energy usage, payments made and other pertinent information.
Supplier	Party undertaking to supply a service or services for which periodic billing is made and includes any agent acting on behalf of the supplier.
Valid reading	A reading that is acceptable to the both the customer and the supplier.
Vulnerable Customer	A customer who for reasons of age, health, disability or severe financial insecurity is unable to safeguard their personal welfare or the personal welfare of other members of the household.
Working Days	Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays.



ENERGY RETAIL Association



Energy Retail Association · 1 Hobhouse Court · Suffolk Street · London · SW1Y 4HH

t: +44 (0)20 7104 4150 f: +44 (0)20 7104 4180 e: info@energy-retail.org.uk www.energy-retail.org.uk

September 2010/Version 5.0