

Code of practice for accurate bills

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Definitions

Actual meter reading	The amount of energy a customer has used based on a recent meter reading.
Agreed meter reading	A meter reading that is acceptable to both the old and new supplier, and the customer.
Bill	A document issued by the supplier to a customer, telling them the charges the customer is due to pay and payments received against the account.
Direct debit	A transfer of money from a customer's bank account direct to the supplier.
Domestic customer	A customer who uses a supply of gas or electricity only or mainly for a domestic purpose. (This includes customers who have a prepayment meter.)
Estimated meter reading	An estimate of a customer's energy use based on old bills if there is not a recent meter reading.
Statement	A document issued to a customer that sets out their energy use, payments made and other relevant information. Most customers with a prepayment meter only receive statements, they do not receive bills.
Switching	This is when a customer moves from one supplier to another.
Supplier	The organisation supplying a service (or services) that they regularly send the customer a bill for. 'Supplier' includes any agent acting on behalf of the supplier.
Tariff	The deal the customer is signed up to, previously referred to as a 'package', 'product' or 'deal'.
Working days	Monday to Friday, not including bank holidays.

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.

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 an important code, 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 independently and thoroughly audited every year against five commitment areas – switching, meter readings, energy bills and statements, payments and refunds, and the 12-month back-billing rule (where the supplier is at fault).

This code sets out the minimum standards members must follow, as well as the responsibilities of all energy suppliers. The code has the following five commitments.

- 1. Switching:** Suppliers will work with customers to make sure accurate information is recorded and transfers between suppliers are smooth.
- 2. Meter reading:** Suppliers will offer a range of options to make sure that they get and record the most up-to-date and accurate meter readings.
- 3. Energy bills and statements:** Suppliers will use all the information they have available to produce accurate and clear bills, on time.
- 4. Payments and refunds:** Suppliers will make sure they set payments at the right level and that they pay any refunds promptly.
- 5. Back billing:** Suppliers have signed up to the 'back-billing' principles (rules about how far back they can bill you) and will assess each back-billing case individually.

As a customer you can help to make sure that your bills are accurate and that you pay the right amount for the energy that you have used. These are some of the ways you can help. You should check the accuracy of the meter readings on your bill, including estimated readings.

When you move into a property, you need to:

- let your new supplier know so that they can update their records; and
- give your new supplier a meter reading to make sure you receive accurate bills.

When you leave a property or change supplier, you need to:

- let your old supplier know and give them your final meter readings;
- give your old supplier a forwarding address so that they can send you a final bill and refund any money they owe you;
- discuss with your supplier the best time to cancel your direct debit if you would like any money owing to you to be paid into your bank account; and
- cancel your standing order (if this applies).

This code is not designed to replace standard energy-supply licences and other obligations that every supplier must keep to. Under these obligations, suppliers must:

- try to read meters every year;
- use actual readings, to improve the accuracy of future bills;
- provide clear bills, with information about your tariff and how much energy you use;
- tell you beforehand about any price increase or changes to your contract which would put you at a disadvantage;
- provide a range of payment options to help you pay any outstanding bill;
- have extra support and protection for vulnerable customers; and
- have complaints processes for when things go wrong.

1. Switching

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

- 1.1** Suppliers will use an agreed meter reading to open and close accounts.
- 1.2** Suppliers will provide you with the information you need during the switching process.

2. Meter reading

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

- 2.1 Your supplier will make sure meter readings are accurate and check any unusual readings before they are used.
- 2.2 Suppliers will provide a range of information in a variety of different ways to make sure that all customers can understand the importance of reading their meter.

3. Energy bills and statements

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

- 3.1** Your supplier will make sure that the charges on your bill accurately reflect your current tariffs and that, when there is a change to your tariffs, you will be charged correctly for the energy you have used.
- 3.2** Your supplier will send you your energy bill or statement in a simple format, so that you can understand how they have worked out your bill.
- 3.3** If your supplier does not have an actual reading they will send a bill based on the typical amount of energy you have used in the past, or based on the average amount of energy you have used or your supplier thinks you will use.
- 3.4** Your supplier will produce your energy bill or statement in line with the billing schedule you have agreed with them and they will issue your bill within 15 working days of the date it is due. If the billing date changes in the future by more than 20 working days, your supplier will let you know in advance.
- 3.5** Your supplier will make sure that they check unusually high or low bills before they send them out.
- 3.6** If you receive an estimated bill and then provide your own accurate reading, your supplier may use this reading to produce a revised bill or statement. If you then need a new bill, your supplier will send it out within 10 working days of receiving your meter reading.

4. Payments and refunds

Suppliers will make sure they set payments at the right level and that they pay any refunds promptly.

4.1 If you pay by monthly direct debit, your supplier will take all reasonable steps to make sure they set your payments at the right level.

Your supplier will review your account at least every 12 months. The review will make sure your payments cover your energy use.

If your supplier has a recent actual meter reading, they will review your direct debit arrangement every six months or earlier.

4.2 If your supplier owes you money in relation to your energy bill, they will refund any amount they owe promptly, in line with the terms and conditions of your contract.

4.3 If you switch supplier, your old supplier will make sure they will pay any refund they owe you within 10 working days of sending your final bill or statement, as long as they have an actual meter reading and bank account details or your name and a forwarding address.

5. Back billing

Suppliers have signed up to the back-billing principle and will assess each back-billing case individually.

- 5.1** If your supplier is at fault and has not sent you an accurate bill, they will not ask you to pay any extra for energy you used (and for which you did not receive an accurate bill) more than one year before they issued the bill.

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