

Avoid disconnection

If you're having difficulties paying your energy or water bill, this Fact Sheet tells you when you can and can't be disconnected, what you can do when faced with a disconnection/restriction warning and what you can do when your supply has been disconnected/ restricted. Help is available if you need it.

Please read this Fact Sheet if you:

- are about to be disconnected or restricted
- want to avoid disconnection or restriction
- are wrongfully disconnected or restricted.



ENERGY & WATER
OMBUDSMAN SA

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When you can be disconnected or restricted

Your electricity or gas supply can be disconnected or water supply restricted if:

- you fail to pay a bill or a security deposit for connection services to your premises
- you don't provide safe access to your meters for three consecutive scheduled meter reads
- you provided false information to be connected
- you don't provide acceptable identification when requested by your supplier
- you cause damage to the distributor's equipment or interfere with a third party's supply.

Supply can also be disconnected or restricted:

- for health and safety reasons
- in an emergency or at the request of police
- when illegal activities are suspected at your premises.

However, your energy or water supplier must give you fair notice before disconnecting or restricting your service.

Reminder notice and warning

Your supplier must make you aware of any outstanding amounts. They must try to contact you by phone, mail, email or in person.

After you receive a reminder notice, you have five business days to contact your water supplier or six business days to contact your energy supplier to pay the outstanding amount. In most cases you'll still be able to negotiate a payment plan, but you must contact your energy or water supplier to discuss your situation.

If you do not act on the reminder notice, your supplier will send you a notice informing you that your energy will be disconnected in five business days or your water will be restricted in 10 business days. The warnings must include contact details for the Energy & Water Ombudsman SA.

When you cannot be disconnected or restricted

Disconnections and restrictions are not permitted:

- after 3pm on a business day, Monday to Thursday
- at all on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, public holidays or the day before a public holiday (except in the case of a planned interruption)
- if a member of your household relies on life support equipment
- if you have lodged a complaint in relation to the disconnection or restriction with us
- for non-payment where the amount outstanding is less than the minimum amount prescribed by the Australian Energy Regulator.

Furthermore, your energy supply can't be disconnected:

- between 20 and 31 December (inclusive)
- in extreme weather conditions (such as a heatwave).

For health reasons water supply cannot be disconnected, but your water supplier can restrict the water flow.

Water supply can't be restricted:

- when the supplier is undertaking debt recovery action against you
- where you are participating in the hardship program and you have applied for assistance with relevant agencies and are awaiting a decision
- for non-payment where the amount outstanding is less than the amount prescribed by the Essential Services Commission of South Australia
- if there is a total fire ban in place in your area.

Payment plans and assistance

If you're having trouble paying your bill, there are a number of things your energy or water supplier can do to help.

They can:

- offer a payment plan
- check if you are entitled to any rebates or concessions
- put you on their financial hardship program
- give you information on independent financial
- counselling services
- offer to arrange for an energy or water audit to identify where you can save money
- ensure that you are on the best energy plan for you.

If you agree to a payment plan, make sure you can meet the payments or you may still be at risk of having your energy supply disconnected or water supply restricted. Also, your energy or water supplier may not agree to a payment plan if you have failed payment plans in the past.

If you can't agree on a payment plan with your supplier, we may be able to help. See *Fact Sheet: Payment assistance for more information*.

'Dear occupant' letters

If electricity, gas or water is used at a property but an account hasn't been set up, the energy or water supplier will send bills, letters and notices addressed to the 'occupant', 'customer' or 'resident'.

It's easy to throw away that kind of letters thinking they are general marketing material. It is important that you read such letters, as they may be a disconnection or restriction warning. Contact the energy or water supplier as soon as possible to discuss.

If you can't resolve matters with your energy or water supplier directly, contact us for assistance.

Reconnection

If your energy has been disconnected or your water supply restricted, contact the relevant supplier immediately. You'll usually need to pay something towards your bill immediately and organise a payment plan to have your energy supply reconnected or your water flow restored.

You may also be charged a reconnection fee. You'll pay more if you want to reconnect outside of business hours. You may also have to pay a security deposit.

Wrongful disconnection or restriction

If the supplier has wrongfully disconnected your energy supply or restricted your water service, you may be entitled to compensation. This applies if the supplier:

- had no right under legislation or a contract to do so
- did not comply with the disconnection procedures
- disconnected the wrong premises
- didn't give you a disconnection warning.

If you find yourself in this situation, contact your energy or water supplier to claim a compensation payment.