Factsheet

Meters explained

This Fact Sheet provides key information about electricity, gas and water meters and how to read them.

Read this Fact Sheet if you want to know about:

- meter identifiers, which are unique serial numbers on your meter
- reading meters
- different types of meters for gas, electricity and water
- calculating your usage.

ENERGY & WATER OMBUDSMAN SA

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Meter identifiers

All electricity, gas and water meters have a unique serial number.

You should check your meter numbers before contacting your energy or water retailer, especially when:

- you're moving to a new house
- you're changing suppliers
- your address is hard to find, is part of a subdivided property or is known by a name or lot number.

Your electricity bill will show a National Metering Identifier (NMI), which is another way for suppliers to find your address.

Your gas bill will show a similar identifier but is called a Meter Installation Reference Number (MIRN).

Some properties have more than one meter and more than one NMI or MIRN. You should make sure you know where all your meters are located and keep a record of the numbers.

Electricity – National Metering Identifier (NMI)

Gas – Meter Installation Reference Number (MIRN)

Water – Meter Serial Number

Where is my meter?

Electricity and gas meters can be found in a variety of places. They are usually somewhere obvious, such as the front or side of a property, but can be behind fences or locked gates and even inside a building.

Water meters are usually in the ground at the front of your property, near the boundary line.

If you live in a unit complex, all the meters are likely to be in one location. In some older unit blocks, there may only be one meter for the property and the body corporate or landlord may determine how the usage is charged to residents.

Who reads my meter?

Usually the distributor (the entity that owns the poles, wires, pipes and meters) reads your electricity meter and provides the reading to your retailer for billing. However, some newer meters are 'smart' meters that can be read remotely by the retailer. For more information about smart meters, see *Fact Sheet: Smart meters*.

It is your supplier's responsibility to ensure a reading is taken as frequently as required, which is at least once every 12 months, and to advise you if they have not done so.

The date of your next meter read is shown on your energy or water bill. It is an approximate date only.

Suppliers and their representatives, such as meter readers, must carry official identification and show it if you ask to see it when accessing your property.

Are you being billed for the right meter number?

Check the meter number listed on your energy or water bill; it's usually on the back. Compare it to the serial number on the front of your meter. If they do not match, contact your energy or water retailer and ask them to record the right number. If you believe your bill is unusually high because of a billing error, ask your supplier to explain it to you or to carry out a full investigation. If you're still not happy after contacting your supplier, contact us for assistance.

To ensure the meter listed on your bill is the right meter for your property, you can turn off your main switch or gas or water tap for a few minutes and check that your meter stops recording usage.

- Mechanical meters: the disc stops spinning (it may take several minutes).
- Odometer meters: the red numbers will stop ticking over (it may take several minutes).
- Electronic meters: the indicator will stop pulsing and/or usage will stop recording.

If the meter doesn't stop when you have turned the main switch off, it could mean one of the following.

- It is not your meter. If your meter is together with others, check to see whether one of the other meters has stopped recording, as that may be your meter.
- Something from an adjoining property is connected to your meter and is going through your main switch or gas or water pipes. Check with adjoining properties to see if any lights or power points have stopped working.
- The meter is faulty. Your energy or water supplier can arrange a meter test. This is at your cost unless the meter is found to be faulty. It is a rare for a meter to be faulty, so we suggest you only ask for this test as a last resort.

There may be additional meters in your meter box. They should also be listed on your bills. For example, you may have an electric hot water system, under-floor heating or heat bank heating, or you may have a separate off-peak or "controlled load" meter. If you have an electronic meter, the peak and off-peak usage may be displayed within the one meter as "registers".

If you live on a property that has connecting walls or in a unit complex with all meters located together, you will need to check to ensure that only your wiring or piping is connected to the meter and that you're not potentially paying for community services or someone else's energy or water.

For information on why you may receive a higher bill refer to *Fact Sheet: High bills explained*.

Access to your meter

You must provide safe and clear access to your meter for maintenance, meter reads and connecting or disconnecting supply. If you live within a secure complex, your supplier will have access arrangements with the complex manager.

If the meter reader can't get access to your meter, the supplier will estimate your meter read for billing purposes. Your bill will show it is estimated. If access to the meter continues to be denied, your retailer has the right to disconnect or restrict supply. If you cannot provide clear access, contact your supplier to find out what other arrangements you can make.

Smart meters are gradually replacing the traditional physical reading of electricity meters. Smart meters can be read remotely so meter readers will no longer be required to attend properties for every reading. However, water and gas meters are still read by meter readers.

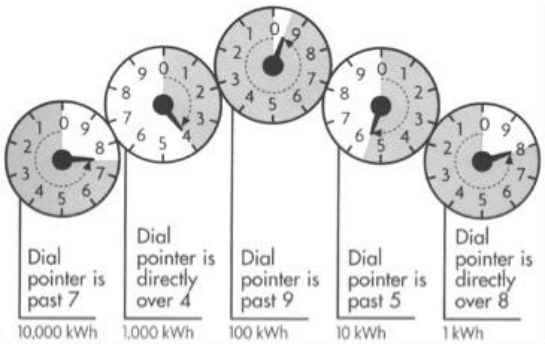
How do I read my meter?

Knowing how to read your meter helps you calculate and monitor your usage. It's also a good idea to read the meter when you first move in to a property and again when you leave to check that you have been billed accurately. It's also a good idea to take a photograph of the reading to verify the usage on your bills.

Dial meters

Dial meters have small clock faces that are read from left to right. Ignore the dial marked 1/10 on electricity meters and the red pointer on gas meters, as these are only used for testing.

Record the numbers from each dial (from left to right). If the pointer is sitting between two numbers on a dial, record the lowest number. If the pointer is directly over a number, say 4, underline it when you write it down.



As an example, the reading from the dial pictured is 74958. If a nine follows any number underlined, (i.e. the 4) reduce that figure by one. The correct reading on this meter is 73958.

Odometer meters

Simply read the numbers from left to right (ignore any red numbers).

Digital meters

Digital meters will have a digital display and the reading is simply the numbers from left to right (excluding number/s after the decimal point or any numbers in red).

If you have an electric hot water or solar system, you may need to press a button to display the electricity meter read and continue to press it through a few screens until the reads for each register are displayed.

Most solar panel installations have a special "import/export meter". Refer to the manufacturer's instruction manual or contact SA Power Networks by phoning 131 261 to find out how to read this type of meter.

Calculating usage

Your electricity meter records the number of kilowatt- hours (kWh) of electricity you have used. Your gas meter records the number of cubic metres or feet of gas you have used. Your water meter records the number of kilolitres of water you have used.

By taking the current read and subtracting the previous read you can calculate your electricity, gas or water usage. For example, the read taken on the dial meter above was 73958. If the previous read was 72457, then you have used 1501 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity since the previous read.

If there were 60 days between the two reads, then the average daily usage would be 25 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per day. Your retailer should include the average daily usage information on your bill, and you should be able to use the calculation above to monitor your usage.