

High bills explained

This Fact Sheet explains why your energy or water bill may be higher than you expected.

Please read this Fact Sheet if you want to know:

- the possible reasons for your high energy or water bill ways to check your energy and water usage
- what you can do if you have difficulty in paying your bills
- how to contact the Ombudsman if you need assistance.



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Why is my bill so high?

If you have received an energy or water bill that is higher than you expected, your first need to clarify whether it is correct or whether an error has been made or there is some kind of problem. First ask yourself these questions.

Has my usage been estimated?

Check your bills for the word estimated (or the letter E) or substituted (or the letter S) beside the meter read. Your bills may be estimated if the meter reader has been unable to get an actual read. Your supplier may use several methods for estimating reads, which may vary from the actual read on the meter.

If your current bill has been estimated, compare the read on the bill with the actual read on your meter. If the actual read is lower, this may explain your high bill.

If your current bill shows an actual read, and therefore usage that is higher than you expected, check whether previous bills included estimated reads. If they did, and the estimated usage was lower than your actual usage, your current bill may be higher to “catch up”.

Ask your energy supplier for more details if you think this is the case.

Have I used more energy or water recently?

- Have you been at home more during this billing period?
- Have you increased your use of appliances such as heaters, clothes dryer, air-conditioning or cooling fans?
- Have you changed temperature settings for your heating or cooling?
- Have you had guests staying or used electrical tools to do renovations?

- Are your kitchen appliances old and possibly faulty or not energy efficient?
- Have you bought any new appliances lately?
- Have you installed a pool or a spa?
- Have you landscaped your garden or planted new lawn?
- Is there a leaking pipe somewhere?

Any change in circumstances may increase your energy and water usage and may lead to an increase in your bill.

If you want to be certain about the amount of energy you use, consider the following.

- Read your meter at a set time on a typical day (be careful not to change your usual usage pattern).
- Read your meter again at the same time the next day. The difference between the two will be the amount you used in the previous 24 hours.
- Compare the amount with the “average daily use” figure on your bill. If it’s about the same, and you think your usage is high, you may need some advice about managing it. The Energy Advisory Service offers free independent energy advice and can be contacted by calling 1800 671 907 or by emailing energyadvice@sa.gov.au. You can also compare energy offers for your residence or small business at www.energymadeeasy.gov.au.

Did I receive my last bill?

If you didn’t receive a bill for the previous period or you only paid part of it, your current bill may include an outstanding amount from the last bill.

Were there other fees and charges?

Check if your bill includes any late payment fees, establishment fees or early termination fees.

Has the tariff changed?

Tariff rates for electricity, gas and water often change annually. Any increase in tariff will lead to a higher bill even if your energy usage has not changed.

How do I check my usage?

To check your energy or water usage, you need to identify all the appliances that you are using.

- Turn off all lights and appliances at the power point.
- Turn off all gas appliances.
- Turn off all taps, sprinklers and drippers.

If the meters are still recording usage when everything on your property is turned off, you may have some wiring or piping from an adjoining property or common property connected to your meter (this may not be wired or piped through your main switch or meter). You should contact an electrician, plumber or gas fitter to fix it.

Check your off-peak settings

If you have off-peak hot water or other approved storage appliances, your off-peak controlled load meter will record usage during off-peak times (overnight) in accordance with the times pre-set on a separate time-clock. While the time-clock sometimes gets out of step with actual time, because of power outages or daylight saving, it still should only be running for six to eight hours per day – that is why it is called “controlled load”. No matter what time their meter is running, all power is charged at off-peak rates. If you run out of hot water and can ‘boost’ your hot water service, it would usually be charged at peak rates and the usage recorded on your peak meter/register.

Check your appliance usage

When your meter has stopped, record the meter read and the time of day. Run only essential appliances (i.e. your fridges and freezers, but preferably not heaters or air conditioners) for 24 hours then read your meter again. Subtract the first read from this one to find out the total amount of kilowatt- hours (kWh) you have used.

To check the usage of your other appliances, run one for a period during the next 24 hours and read the meter again. Subtract the previous read from this one and you will again know the total amount of kWh used in the 24-hour period. Compare this to the first period where you only ran the

essential appliances and you will know how many kWh the other appliance has used for the number of hours you ran it.

For example, if your essential appliances used 10 kWh

for the first 24-hour period but when you ran your air-conditioner for five hours at night in addition to the essential appliances and the total read was 25 kWh, then the difference is 15 kWh. The amount of power your air-conditioner used for 5 hours was 3 kWh per hour.

By undertaking this type of audit for a week, running different appliances during each 24-hour period, you will identify how your appliances are contributing to the bills.

Check for a gas or water leak

Turn off all your gas appliances and check whether your gas meter dial is still moving. If it is, there may be a leak in a pipe or appliance. If you suspect a leak, notify your gas supplier immediately. You may need a licensed gas fitter to inspect your pipes.

For a water leak, take two reads a couple of hours apart. Make sure no one uses water during this period. If there is a difference between the two reads, you may have a leak. Leaks tend to get worse, so have it repaired quickly by a plumber.

What actions can I take?**Check for a billing error**

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.

Seek help

If you believe the bills are too high, or the usage that is recording with each appliance is far higher than the appliance should use, consult an electrician, plumber or gas fitter to check your appliances or contact your energy or water supplier for further advice.

To check the usage of small individual appliances you can contact your local library for a Home Energy Toolkit, which include an appliance meter.

The Energy Advisory Service offers free independent energy advice. You can contact them at <https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/energy-and-environment> or call 8204 1888.

Refer to *Fact Sheet: Measuring your electrical usage*. This will help you work out how to calculate the appliance ratings of individual appliances.

Ask to have things checked

If you suspect a problem with the meter or any other equipment owned by the energy or water supplier, ask what they can test (e.g. pipes, meter) and if there will be any cost to you.

What can I do if I have difficulty paying?

If you cannot pay your bill, contact your energy or water supplier immediately to find out how they can help you avoid disconnection or restriction.

All suppliers are required to offer flexible payment options and to have programs that offer additional support to customers who are experiencing financial hardship. Your energy supplier can also offer suggestions to help you manage paying your future bills.

For more information, please see *Fact Sheet: Payment assistance* and *Fact Sheet: Avoiding disconnection*.