



# Tenants & landlords

## **Do tenants have to open electricity and gas accounts?**

Yes, unless the tenancy agreement specifically says the rent includes electricity and gas use.

Tenants need to contact an electricity or gas company to open an account at the beginning of a tenancy – even if these services are already turned on at the property.

This includes properties that have a prepay meter.

The tenants are then responsible for paying the electricity and gas bills, which normally include associated line charges.

If electricity or gas costs are part of the rent, the landlord will need to open an account and pay the bills.

If the property is in the North Island 'King Country' area, the line charges will be billed separately by The Lines Company, unless a prepayment meter is installed. The tenant, landlord and company need to agree who is responsible for this account.

## **What if the account is in the landlord's name and is not paid?**

If the landlord fails to pay a bill on time the property may be disconnected. The tenants should discuss this issue with the landlord as soon as possible.

The Department of Building and Housing has information on dealing with problems between tenants and landlords, including how to make an application to the Tenancy Tribunal.

Go to [www.dbh.govt.nz](http://www.dbh.govt.nz) or call 0800 TENANCY (0800 83 62 62)

## **How do I open an account?**

You can usually open an account over the telephone by calling an electricity or gas company.

The Powerswitch website shows the various prices of energy companies offering electricity and gas in each area: [www.powerswitch.org.nz](http://www.powerswitch.org.nz).

Electricity and gas companies can require you to pay a bond for a new account. If the company asks for a bond it should tell you why it is asking for one, and when and how the bond will be refunded.

## **Do I need to read the meter?**

The account holder, tenant or landlord, should read the electricity and gas meters at the beginning and end of a tenancy.

A landlord has to provide tenants with reasonable access to the meter.

Reading the meter occasionally means you can check the readings being used by the energy company. If the readings are different, contact the energy company straight away.

Keep records of readings, bills, letters and any contact with the electricity or gas companies.

## **Who is responsible for the account in a shared house?**

When a person opens an account in their name, they take responsibility for all future bills. The account holder should close the account when they move out. Otherwise, they remain responsible for payment of the bills even if they are not living at the property.

If the account is in more than one name, each person can be held responsible. It is important to keep account holder details up-to-date, for example, when people move out.

Everyone in the household needs to agree on who will be responsible for paying the bills. It is a good idea for people living in shared housing to write down an agreement about how electricity and gas bills will be dealt with.

The agreement should make it clear whether the rent or board includes electricity and gas, or if these bills are extra.

## **What happens if tenants don't open an account?**

If tenants are using electricity or gas and they don't open an account, the property may be disconnected.

Using electricity or gas when you don't intend to pay for it is theft.

### **Financial difficulties**

People who are having trouble paying electricity or gas bills should talk to their energy company as soon as possible.

Electricity and gas companies should have policies to help people who are having difficulty paying their bills. The companies may agree to set up a payment plan for the account holder to pay a debt off over time.

Prepay meters can help manage the cost of electricity. There is generally at least one company in every area offering prepay meters for electricity. Tenants will usually need to get their landlord's permission to have a prepay meter installed.

Check the installation costs and electricity prices for prepay meters before deciding whether to have a prepay meter installed.

If you are worried about how much electricity or gas you are using, ask for our fact sheet on High Bills.

Electricity and gas companies and local community welfare organisations (such as a Citizens Advice Bureau or a budget advice organisation) can give more information on how to cope with financial difficulties. Work & Income may be able to give some emergency help with energy bills.

### **Billing errors**

If you think there is a billing or meter reading error, you need to talk to your energy company straight away.

### **Closing an account**

It can take a few days to close an account. Tenants should contact their electricity and gas companies as soon as they know when they are going to move out.

Companies need notice of a person's intention to close an account – ask your company how many days notice it needs.

If landlords use electricity or gas at the property when it is vacant, they are responsible for paying for that. It is a good idea to check hot water cylinders and heaters are turned off when no one is living in the property.

### **Energy efficiency**

Landlords who want to make their properties more energy efficient should look at the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority website, [www.eeca.govt.nz](http://www.eeca.govt.nz). The website has information on a national project aimed at insulating rental properties occupied by low-income tenants.

### **Renting and tenancy information**

For more information on renting and tenancy agreements, contact the Department of Building and Housing on 0800 83 62 62 or [www.dbh.govt.nz](http://www.dbh.govt.nz)

You can also talk to a community law centre, Citizens Advice Bureau or local tenants' group – see the white pages of the phone book for contact details.

### **Resolving complaints**

If you have any problems with your energy company, contact them first and explain your situation.

If the matter is not resolved straight away, tell them you want to make a complaint. Keep copies of letters and e-mails, and notes of calls including names, dates and times.

You can contact us at any time for information about the complaint resolution process.

### **The office of the Electricity and Gas Complaints Commissioner**

The Electricity and Gas Complaints Commissioner's office provides a fair and independent way of resolving complaints about electricity or gas companies. Our service is free to complainants.

### **Contact information**

Freephone 0800 22 33 40

Freefax 0800 22 33 47

Freepost Freepost 192682  
PO Box 5875  
Lambton Quay  
Wellington 6145

E-mail [info@egcomplaints.co.nz](mailto:info@egcomplaints.co.nz)

Website [www.egcomplaints.co.nz](http://www.egcomplaints.co.nz)