



ESTIMATED BILLS AND METER ACCESS

Information for residential customers in Victoria

Estimated bills are issued when no actual meter read has been obtained from your meter. This can cause inconvenience and worry. This fact sheet will help you to avoid receiving estimated bills and to understand your rights and responsibilities.

An estimated bill is likely to be either above or below your usage. If it's above your usage, you are paying more than you should. If it's below your usage, you will get a catch-up bill, also known as a backbill, at some stage.

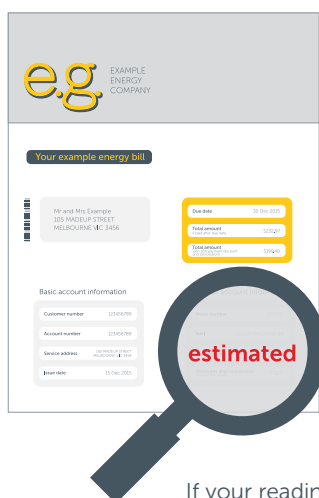
Why wasn't my meter read?

The most common reason for a meter not being read is that the meter reader could not access the meter. This may be due to:

- secure premises with locked gates
- dog/s preventing access
- the meter being in an inaccessible place, such as inside the house or, for a business, in a shop which is not open when the meter reader comes.

Isn't it a bit old-fashioned to have a meter reader walking around collecting readings?

Smart Meter technology is gradually replacing the regular physical reading of electricity meters. Most Smart Meters are capable of being read remotely through a communications network, so that meter readers will no longer be required to attend properties for every reading. However, water and gas meters are still read by meter readers.



Customers have an obligation to provide access to the meter

If there is a locked gate, a dog, or if meter access is unsafe or hindered, the meter reader does not have to read the meter, meaning your company will send you an estimated bill. According to the relevant energy codes and the [Urban Water Customer Service Code \(clause 12.10\(b\)\)](#), a customer has a duty to provide safe, convenient and unhindered access to a meter.

In fact, if you continue to deny access to the meter, even after requests to do so, an energy company is entitled to disconnect you. However, companies rarely take that type of action, preferring to send estimated bills instead.

Smart Meters and estimated bills

Sometimes there are problems with parts of the interval data collected from Smart Meters, which results in 'substituted' meter reads. These substituted reads are similar to 'estimated' meter reads. If part of your Smart Meter data is substituted then your bill will say that it is estimated, even if most of the bill is based on actual meter read data.



If your reading has been estimated, it must say so on your bill.



How often should the meter be read?

According to the [Energy Retail Code](#), meter readers have to try their best to read electricity and gas meters at least once every twelve months (clause 20 (2)). Water meters should be read every billing cycle or at least once every twelve months (clause 4.2 of the [Urban Water Customer Service Code](#)).

Meter readers should attempt to read:

- electricity meters every **three months**
- gas meters every **two months**
- water meters every **three or four months**, depending on where you live.

But the company hasn't broken the law by not reading the meter if you have not provided safe and unhindered access.

I'm concerned about security and I'm not prepared to leave my house unsecured for the meter reader

A possible solution for electricity and gas meters is to buy a special lock called a Victorian Power Industry (VPI) lock from electrical wholesalers or some hardware shops. They come in a variety of forms—padlocks, bolts, ordinary locks, etc. The energy meter reader has a master key for the VPI locks and, once you've told your company you've got a VPI lock, the meter will be able to be read. However, water corporations do not use VPI locks. Contact your water corporation to discuss options that may be available.

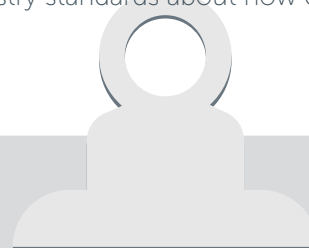


Does getting an estimated bill matter?

An estimated bill will be either above or below your usage. If it's above your usage, you are paying more than you should. If it's below, you will get a catch-up bill at some stage and if the bill has been under-estimated over a year or more, that could be a large bill. If your company has tried its best to read the meter, and access has been denied, then the company may be able to 'backbill' you right back to the last reading (clauses 21 and 30 of the [Energy Retail Code](#)), otherwise up to nine months. So you are better off getting an actual bill than an estimated bill.

How do they estimate the bill?

If the company has your billing history, the estimation will probably be based on your previous usage. If it doesn't have your usage history (perhaps you changed companies or moved in recently), the estimation will be based on average usage across a class of customers. There are industry standards about how estimations are done.



Checklist:

Don't know where to start? This checklist may help.

Things you can do:

- Is your meter freely accessible? If not, can you provide access to it, for example, by installing a VPI lock or a key safe?
- Are you due for a meter exchange? If so, take a meter reading or a photo of your meter display before your new meter is installed to ensure your final bill is based on an accurate, actual meter read.
- Has your meter been exchanged within a billing cycle? This may mean you receive an estimated read until the next scheduled meter reading.

Talking to your company:

- Talk to your company about your billing concerns.
- Talk to your energy distributor or water corporation if you are concerned about your meter exchange or your new meter.

Contacting EWOV:

- If you can't sort out the problem with your company directly, contact EWOV.
- Have **all your details ready**, including bills and your own notes.

Note: The [Energy Retail Code](#) only applies to customers who use less than 40MWh of electricity or 1,000GJ of gas per year.