



DISCONNECTION AND RESTRICTION FOR DEBT

Information for residential and small business customers

Disconnection or restriction of your supply is a very serious step for your company to take. This fact sheet will help you understand your rights and responsibilities and the assistance which may be available to you.

Disconnection of your electricity or natural gas supply, or restriction of your water supply, is a last resort for your company. There are rules about what it must do before it takes this action.

Note: This does not apply to LPG. Please refer to the [EWOV and LPG fact sheet](#) for more information.

The difference between energy and water

Electricity and gas companies can disconnect your supply—that means cut it off altogether.

Your water company cannot cut your water off, but it can limit the amount of water you receive.

Disconnected or restricted, or facing disconnection or restriction? What you need to do

Call the company that sends your bills straight away. Ask what you have to do to be reconnected, or to avoid being cut off or restricted. You will probably be asked to pay part of what you owe. If you can't afford to pay the amount the company wants, ask about its hardship program.

You should be able to work out a payment plan that is affordable based on your capacity to pay. Setting up a payment plan may be harder if you've had a failed payment plan in the past. If you can't work something out with the company, call EWOV.

What are the rules?

Your rights and responsibilities—and those of your company—are set out in energy and water codes.

For electricity and natural gas, it's the [Energy Retail Code](#). For metropolitan and regional urban water, it's the [Urban Water Customer Service Code](#).

To disconnect your energy or restrict your water supply, your company must:

- Send you a **bill**. For Standard Retail Contract customers, energy bills must give you at least 13 business days to pay. Market Retail Contract customers will have the pay-by timeframe and terms set out in their contract. Water bills must give you at least 14 calendar days to pay.
- Send you a **reminder notice**, unless you are on a shortened collection cycle.
- Send you an **energy disconnection or water restriction warning notice**. This notice must include EWOV's contact information.
- Tell you that it can disconnect your electricity supply remotely, if you have a Smart Meter.

If you receive a letter addressed 'To the Occupier', you must open it. If you ignore these letters, you may be disconnected or restricted from supply. Call the company to discuss why your name is not on the account.

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

Tips for customers

You should contact your company as soon as possible if you think you may not be able to pay your bill by the due date. If you don't tell the company, it won't know, which may result in collection activity, disconnection or restriction.

If you know you may have difficulty paying, call your company and request a suitable payment plan.



When are disconnections and restrictions not allowed?

Your company isn't allowed to disconnect or restrict you for not paying:

- on a Friday, the weekend, a public holiday or the day before a public holiday
- for energy, before 8am or after 2pm on a business day (residential), or after 3pm (business). For water, after 3pm on any day
- between 20 December and 31 December (energy only)
- if someone in your household depends on life support equipment (energy), or if the customer is a registered special needs customer (water)
- if water restriction would cause a health hazard
- if you've applied for a Utility Relief Grant rebate and a decision hasn't yet been made
- if you have a complaint with EWOV and it is not yet resolved
- if you owe less than \$300 (including GST) for energy, or less than \$200 for water, and have been paying your bills
- your water can't be disconnected (restricted) if it's a total fire ban day.

What if your company doesn't follow the rules?

If your company hasn't followed the rules and disconnected your **energy**, it must pay you a Wrongful Disconnection Payment (WDP).

The WDP is \$500 a day (for disconnections after 1 January 2016, or \$250 per day prior to 1 January 2016) – prorated for part days. **You need to contact your company within 14 days following the disconnection**, otherwise the WDP amount will be capped at a maximum of \$3,500.

WDP doesn't apply to restriction of **water**. Water customers may be eligible for a Guaranteed Service Level (GSL) payment of \$300 if the water company hasn't complied with all of the rules before restricting supply.

If you think your electricity, gas or water was disconnected or restricted wrongfully, contact your company. If you can't sort it out, call EWOV.

Other financial assistance

There are government concessions, a Utility Relief Grant that you can apply for to help with an unexpected high bill or a change in your circumstances. If you're having trouble paying, see EWOV's [Fact Sheet 7: Energy and water payment difficulties](#).

There's more about other sources of help in EWOV's [Fact Sheet 37: Pocket Contacts, a guide to more helpful free services](#).

Getting reconnected or derestricted

Energy

Call your company within 10 business days of disconnection. Once a payment agreement is in place, or you've applied for the Utility Relief Grant Scheme, or there is no longer a reason for your supply to be disconnected, the company must reconnect your energy supply on the same day as long as it's requested before 3pm. If it's after 3pm, it will be the next business day.

For safety reasons, the mains switch needs to be turned to the "off" position to have electricity reconnected. For gas, a person over the age of 18 needs to be at the property.

Water

For water restrictions, the company must restore full supply within 24 hours once it is aware that the restriction requires lifting.

Checklist

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

- Have you received a bill, reminder notice and disconnection or restriction warning before being disconnected or restricted?

Talk to your company:

- If you are experiencing payment difficulties, discuss them with your company.
- If you have been disconnected or restricted, call your company and ask to set up a payment plan and be reconnected or derestricted.
- Be honest about what you can regularly afford to pay on your debt.
- Ask your company to assess whether a Wrongful Disconnection Payment or Guaranteed Service Level payment applies in your case.

Contacting EWOV:

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