



**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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## **ENERGY RETAIL DISCONNECTIONS ON THE RISE IN 2011-12**

Disconnection rates for retail electricity and gas consumers jumped sharply in Victoria during 2011-12, according to a report issued today by the State's energy regulator, the Essential Services Commission.

The report by the Essential Services Commission (ESC) revealed the rate of electricity disconnection jumped from 0.77 per 100 customers to 1.0 per 100, while the rate of gas disconnections jumped from 0.74 per 100 customers to 1.1 per 100.

Almost 24,000 electricity customers were disconnected in 2011-12, up 33 per cent on the previous year, while more than 20,000 gas customers were disconnected, up by 50 per cent.

It also found the rate of complaints rose in the financial year; for electricity, up from 4.1 per 100 customers in 2010-11 to 4.7 per 100 customers and for gas, from 1.1 per 100 complaints per 100 customers to 1.5 per 100 in 2011-12.

The report found that almost half of the disconnected customers for both electricity and gas were reconnected again within seven days at the same address and with the same name.

ESC Chief Executive Officer David Heeps said the increased rate of disconnections for both electricity and gas suggested that retailers were using disconnection to resolve payment issues.

"As the high rate of reconnections at the same address implies, most of the disconnections are of customers who struggle to pay their bills – not 'skippers' or movers from a residence," he said.

"If retailers could better identify and support customers in hardship, then the adoption of a payment plan may head off disconnection as a last resort."

The report also noted that:

- Origin Energy, TRUenergy and AGL accounted for more than 70 per cent of Victoria's electricity retail customers and 78 per cent of gas retail customer numbers.
- Average waiting times to speak to a call centre operator rose from 101 seconds in 2010-11 to 107 seconds in 2011-12, with eight per cent of calls abandoned before being forwarded to the operator.
- Total expenditure on electricity and gas concessions rose to \$203.7 million in 2011-12, up from \$161.1 million the previous year.

**The Energy Retailers Comparative Performance Report (Customer Service) for 2011-12 is at [www.esc.vic.gov.au](http://www.esc.vic.gov.au)**

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