

Spotlight on energy companies estimated billing

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Electricity and gas

The state's energy regulator will be looking at how energy companies estimate bills after concerns were raised about customers being over-charged thousands of dollars.

The Essential Services Commission has put energy companies on notice that estimated billing will be in the spotlight as part of its annual audit of the sector.

Commission chair Ron Ben-David says media reports have raised concerns that some customers were getting gas bills ten times higher than they should due to bills being 'estimated' and not based on meter readings.

"We're particularly concerned about what customers are being told with reports suggesting some customers did not know their bills were estimates and not based on actual usage," he said.

The check on billing practices is a key focus of the commission's annual audit program presented to stakeholders late last week.

Dr Ben-David says audits provide the commission with independent assessment of whether energy companies are complying with their licence obligations.

"If we find poor compliance with the rules or where we find the rules are not delivering fair results for customers, we will act without hesitation to fix the problem," he said.

The audits cover the usual checks on how energy companies are meeting their licence requirements including things like outage notifications, particularly for those on life support, as well as hardship programs and disconnections.

For some, it also means checking on how they've addressed issues highlighted in previous audits and their record of complying with the energy rules.

The commission reports on energy companies' performance in its quarterly and annual market reports. Summaries of annual audit results for each energy company are published online in November each year.

2018 energy company audit program

Timing	Licensee	Audit type	Topic
April-June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st Energy • CovaU • Diamond Energy • Next Business Energy • Sumo Energy • Tango Energy 	Baseline health check	Life support, hardship program, sales and marketing, compliance performance reporting, disconnections and reconnections, billing, advanced metering infrastructure, dispute resolution, tariff variation, deemed customer arrangements and licensee specific obligations
May	All licensees	Pulse check	Estimated bills

Timing	Licensee	Audit type	Topic
June-September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AGL • Alinta Energy • Blue NRG • EnergyAustralia • Origin Energy • Simply Energy 	Tailored audit	Review of remediation activities addressing findings from the 2017 audit
September-December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AusNet Services • Jemena 	Tailored audit	Review of remediation activities addressing findings from the 2017 audit
	Electricity distributors	Thematic	Payment of heat relief package

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