

## **Our Residential Consumer Care Policy**

Energy is important to your health and wellbeing to keep you connected with your community, family and friends. Our Consumer Care Policy has been designed, either by adopting a recommended action or taking an alternative action, to achieve the purpose and outcomes specified in the Electricity Authority and Gas Industry Company Consumer Care Guidelines.

### **What is a Customer Care Policy?**

Among other things, it's our promise to keep you safe and to help you manage your energy costs. It also includes other commitments to you such as:

- Mutual respect and care during all interactions as part of our values/tikanga.
- Working with you in a collaborative and constructive way to solve problems.
- Helping you make decisions so that you have the opportunity to be on a pricing plan that best suits your needs.
- We will work to understand your situation and are proactive in offering assistance.
- Learning from our experiences to continually improve our support processes.
- Communicating with you in a timely and clear way.
- Working together to resolve payment difficulties as early as possible and, with your permission, linking you to support or social agencies to assist you.
- Working with you to try to keep your electricity connected if you are having payment difficulties.

As an energy consumer, you have rights and responsibilities as outlined. You can read the latest version of our General terms and conditions [here](#), along with any other terms and conditions that apply to you.

This policy also sets out the general position and some product specific terms and conditions may alter that general position. It does not form part of any of our terms and conditions and is not a legally binding document. If there are any inconsistencies between this policy and any of our terms and conditions, our terms and conditions will prevail.

### **Your personal information**

We need some information from you, so we can supply you with energy and services. We will make sure this information is stored securely and only used for its intended purpose.

We may collect your personal information in a few different ways. You need to make sure the information you give us is correct and let us know if anything changes.

This will help us to:

- Communicate back to you in a clear and timely way.
- Maintain accurate records of our interactions with you.
- Confirm our contractual commitments to each other, and
- Help resolve any disputes between us.

You can view more about how we manage your personal information in our terms and conditions and privacy policy on our website.

## **Alternate contacts and Authorised persons**

You can provide us with an alternate contact or an authorised person. An alternate contact or authorised person could be a family member, friend, support person or community worker.

It's always good to check that your alternate contact is happy to be your go to. You simply tell us their name and contact details and:

- If they are our first point of contact for your account (e.g., an alternate contact), or
- If we only contact them when we can't get hold of you (e.g., an authorised person).

We may record any communications we have with you, your authorised person or alternate contact and may use these recordings to train our employees and authorised agents and/or to monitor the level of service we provide or for any other purpose stated in our general terms and conditions or our privacy policy.

## **Joining Contact**

Our plans and payment options are available online, or you can contact us to discuss which plan, payment options and services meet your needs. You can view your usage/consumption details online via 'My Account' or our app to make sure you are on the right plan. Visit [contact.co.nz/myaccount](http://contact.co.nz/myaccount) to register. This helps you make an informed decision.

If you would like an independent place to check energy prices, you could use the free Powerswitch website to compare plans. Simply click [here](#).

Before we accept you as a customer, we will get your permission to do a credit check. If this is unsuccessful, we will let you know what options are available for you (for example, you may be eligible for Contact Prepay).

## **Servicing your account**

We work really hard to provide great customer service:

- If you think your bill doesn't look quite right, we will try to resolve this straight away.
- If the query cannot be sorted straight away, we'll look into it further and get back to you as soon as we can.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you may be able to refer it to Utilities Disputes for investigation. They can be contacted on 0800 22 33 40 or

Contact is a member of the Energy Complaints Scheme operated by Utilities Disputes - a free and independent industry complaints resolution process.

If you are Deaf, Hearing Impaired, Blind, Speech Impaired the [New Zealand Relay Service](#) offer a free service that can support you to contact us.

If you speak a different language and are not able to get assistance from a friend or family member, please contact us to see if we can help.

## Self-service options

You can check how much energy you are using, plus other information about your account on our app or online anytime. This can help you make decisions about whether you are on the right usage plan (for example, low vs standard electricity plan).

Simply download the app or sign in to My Account [here](#).

For advice on ways to use energy more efficiently, see our energy savings tips [here](#).

## If you have payment difficulties

We make every effort to get in touch with you through different contact methods as soon as we see that your bill isn't paid. It's important we work together to help you manage your payments if you're finding it difficult.

Here are some ways we can help:

- PrePay lets you pay for your electricity in advance. It's a simple way of keeping control over your electricity bill because you always know how much you've spent, and how much credit you have left. Contact us to see if this is an option for you.
- Choose [weekly or fortnightly billing](#) to align your power bills with your pay.
- Check to see if you are eligible for SmoothPay, where you can pay the same amount weekly, fortnightly or monthly. We work out how much this is, so it covers your energy usage all year round. We also check that the payments are correct and if something changes, we'll be in touch to let you know if the payments need to change to cover your energy usage.
- Check if you are eligible for a payment arrangement by contacting us.
- Where your consumption changes significantly, we have safeguards in place to make you aware such as a note on the relevant bill and tips for ways to help you pay if you need it.
- If you're on a payment plan, we will let you know if a payment has been missed and work with you to ensure that you can meet the payment plan.
- If you are purchasing bundled goods and services, it is useful to know that your payment goes towards the oldest debt equally.

The following agencies may also be able to provide free support and advice:

**Social agency assistance:** You may be able to get extra assistance from Work and Income or another social agency. The Work and Income number is 0800 559 009 or, you can visit online at [workandincome.govt.nz](http://workandincome.govt.nz)

Other social agencies include the Citizens Advice Bureau, local Mayoral Fund or Age Concern.

**Budgeting advice:** You may want to get some budgeting advice if you regularly find it difficult to pay your bill. This friendly, helpful service is available free from Money Talks. You can contact the free financial Helpline on 0800 345 123 or SMS on 4029 or use [help@moneytalks.co.nz](mailto:help@moneytalks.co.nz)

At your request and with your agreement, we will work with your organisation co-operatively, constructively and in a timely manner or refer you to a support agency. We will allow you reasonable time to work with support agencies without incurring a financial penalty.

If new processes get agreed between these types of agencies, Contact will also align our processes within six months of the agencies putting them on their website.

### **Disconnection for non-payment of energy bills**

Disconnection for non-payment is a last resort. We may disconnect your energy supply if you fail to pay any fees and charges (including any bond) invoiced by us in full and by the due date or if you default on any payment arrangement we have agreed with you.

Where you have different premises jointly or collectively billed, we may opt to disconnect the energy supply for non-payment at any or all of these places. Please let us know if you or someone living at your premises is medically dependant on mains electricity so this can be registered with us.

We will only disconnect you if you fail to pay an estimated invoice if we believe it is a fair and reasonable outcome.

Except in the case of requested, agreed or emergency disconnections, we will give you at least:

- at least 7 business days' notice of warning of disconnection (including how you get assistance from social agencies etc.), and
- a final warning no less than 24 hours and no more than 7 days before disconnecting you (the final warning will specify these timeframes).

We will take reasonable steps to make sure you receive our final warning. If we are unable to disconnect your energy supply within the timeframe we've given, we'll send you a further final warning before actually disconnecting your energy supply.

The final disconnection warning we send you will include:

- the address of the premises to be disconnected
- how you may be able to avoid disconnection of your energy supply (if applicable)
- the timeframe for disconnecting your energy supply
- the cost of reconnection (including details of any charges you will need to pay in addition to paying your unpaid invoice)
- our payment options
- our complaints resolution process

If you are a residential customer (except in the case of requested, agreed or emergency disconnections), we will only disconnect your energy supply on a business day, excluding Fridays and the day prior to a public holiday.

### Disconnection for sites with no account holder

If no one has signed up for electricity at a Contact site, we may disconnect the electricity at the site. We will always send sign up and disconnection information to the address before we do this.

There may be times where we can't disconnect in the timeframe we've given. If this is the case, we'll send another notice with the new times before actually disconnecting the energy supply.

## Reconnecting energy supply

You need to contact us if you want to reconnect after your electricity supply has been disconnected. We'll get you back and up running as soon as we can, as long as you pay the fees and meet our criteria below.

Before we reconnect your energy supply, you'll need to pay:

- the total amount outstanding on your account (not just any overdue amount)
- any applicable disconnection fees and additional fees incurred during the disconnection process
- any applicable reconnection fees including for each unsuccessful attempt where you do not give us reasonable access to your premises or metering equipment
- any charges that have accumulated since disconnection, including fixed daily charges
- any applicable bond, or increased bond, as determined by us

You can see our current electricity and natural gas fees [here](#) on our website

Also, you'll need to:

- be at site at the time we reconnect or, if you can't do that, accept responsibility for the safety of the site.
- make sure we can get on-going access to your site (to our satisfaction) so we can do what we need to do under our Ts & Cs of supply
- agree to any other reasonable extra Ts & Cs we think are needed, if any.
- Make sure you switch off all appliances at the time we reconnect. This will help ensure that nothing gets damaged when the sudden surge of power flows through.

## Medically dependent consumers

A residential customer or consumer permanently or temporarily living at the premises is considered 'medically dependent' if they are dependent on mains electricity and/or piped gas for critical medical support, where loss of these may result in loss of life or serious harm.

We will ask you if this applies when you first sign up with Contact and also remind you to tell us annually. If you think you or anyone living at your property fits this description, please contact us immediately on 0800 80 9000.

Once you or a third party have let us know that you or someone living at the property supplied by Contact is medically dependant, with your permission, we will collect and record all relevant information from you and register this on your account. We will share this information with third party providers, for example, Network Companies and Field Services staff so they are aware if they need to action work at your property.

The medical dependency will need to be verified by a qualified Health Practitioner (e.g., GP, District Health Board, Private Hospital) at your own cost unless we ask for a re-verification within 12 months.

If you have been supplied with a "Notice of Potential Medically Dependent Consumer Status", please supply us with a copy.

If we do not receive the required verification from yourself or your Health Practitioner by the date we've outlined, we will let you know that we will remove you from our Medical Dependency Register.

We strongly recommend that as a medically dependent consumer, you do not choose PrePay due to the risk of self-disconnection. We will tell you about this risk when you sign up and suggest you check with your Health Practitioner first when looking at the PrePay option.

### **If I'm medically dependent, what's the best way to get prepared for power or piped gas outage?**

Your safety is the most important thing, so it's vital for our medically dependent customers to have an emergency response plan in place in case there's a power cut, piped gas outage or an emergency disconnection. Power cuts or piped gas outages can happen suddenly during bad weather, if emergency repair work to your power lines needs to be done, or other unexpected things happen.

What to do:

- Ensure you always have a standby battery fully charged.
- Go to a friend's or family member's house where they still have electricity and/or piped gas.
- Call an ambulance on 111 if your circumstances are serious.

### **Fees and bonds**

As you'll know, as the account holder you are responsible for paying all charges from the date your site gets switched to us (in accordance with the relevant switching process regulations and rules) or from when you first used energy or services we provide. Your rates and other applicable charges (including service fees) are included in the plan information we send you and on our website.

Our service fees are available to you online at any time [here](#).

We may also charge you for services done at your site as asked by you or a third-party contractor working on your behalf (for example, a builder, electrician, or arborist.)

#### Additional fees

We won't charge you a fee without giving you notice and telling you the reason for it. We will also let you know if there is something you can do to avoid being charged the fee.

If you ask for a product or service that involves an additional cost, we will tell you the amount or provide an estimate so you can decide if you definitely want to go ahead with it.

#### Adjusting your pricing plan

We may need to adjust your pricing plan if the information we have used to set them is incorrect or needs to be amended. We will let you know if this happens.

### **Paying a bond**

We sometimes ask for a bond. If we do, we'll definitely let you know why.

You can read more about bonds under 'Service fees' [here](#).

A bond may be required for example if you:

- don't have, or maintain, a satisfactory credit record, or
- have had your supply disconnected and have applied to be reconnected.

If we need a bond, we may:

- ask you to pay it immediately, or
- charge the bond on your next bill which you will need to pay by the due date. Any bond will be held in a separate account and will not accrue interest.

### **Giving your bond back to you**

If you leave, we will give you back your bond within one month of you leaving us, as long as you don't owe us any money. If you do, we may repay your bond less any outstanding amounts you owe us.

If you remain our customer and meet all payment obligations for at least 12 months, we will refund the bond to your energy account. However, we may need to keep it for longer than 12 months if you do not keep a satisfactory payment record with us.

### **Contact details you may find handy**

#### Our complaints process

We work hard to look after our customers but if we let you down, we really want to put it right. If you have a complaint about us, please contact our free internal complaints service.

Email: through the website using the "Contact us" section

Phone: 0800 80 9000

Post: Contact Energy Limited, PO Box 624, Wellington 6140

We will try to resolve your complaint straight away and will let you know within two business days that we received it. If we can't resolve it straight away, we promise to give you a response within seven days.

If it is complex or involves other parties, we will investigate on your behalf. In some cases, we may refer you or your complaint to your network operator or meter owner. We will let you know if we do this.

We are a member of the Energy Complaints Scheme operated by Utilities Disputes, this is a free and independent industry complaints body. We are committed to maintaining the standards contained in the General and Scheme rules for the Energy Complaints Scheme.

If the complaint falls within its jurisdiction and it has reached deadlock with us, Utilities Disputes is another avenue for you.

#### Contact details for Utilities Disputes:

Website: [utilitiesdisputes.co.nz](http://utilitiesdisputes.co.nz)

Email: [info@utilitiesdisputes.co.nz](mailto:info@utilitiesdisputes.co.nz)



Phone: 0800 22 33 40 Fax: 0800 22 33 47 Post: PO Box 5875, Wellington 6140 Freepost 192682

If you remain unsatisfied with the way your complaint has been dealt with, even after the intervention of Utilities Disputes, you may pursue the matter in another forum (for example, the Disputes Tribunal or the court system).

*This policy has been approved by the Head of Customer Service at Contact at the time it was first published – 1 July 2021.*

*Revision date 24 January 2024.*

*We commit to disclosing information to the Electricity Authority and Gas Industry Company in accordance with the information disclosure and monitoring in the Consumer Care Guidelines.*