

COVID-19 Energy Bill Hardship Policies

Strata Energy Services provides this general information, so as to assist lot owners and tenants within apartment complexes navigate these present times.

We have sought to collate this Fact Sheet in an objective and factual manner. We are in contact and continue dialogue with the energy retailers during these times.

Overview

Under the Retail Law, electricity & gas energy retailers must implement customer hardship policies for their residential customers. The purpose of a retailer's customer "hardship policy" (or similarly named policy) is to identify customers experiencing payment difficulties (due to hardship) and to assist those customers to better manage their energy bills. Hardship factors cover items such as death in the family, household illness, unemployment & reduced income (the last two of which are most presently applicable). Energy retailers have a requirement to ensure customers can access hardship support when needed.

As a result of the financial pressure that COVID-19 is causing to thousands of residents, many energy retailers are acknowledging the difficult times ahead and urge customers experiencing difficulties paying their bill to get in touch with their supplier.

The Energy and Water ombudsman in your jurisdiction may also be of assistance and they do also encourage you to contact your energy or water provider for information about their affordability programmes.

In addition to energy retailers' support, you may be eligible for government support such as **The Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) Scheme**:

<https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/energy-accounts-payment-assistance-eapa-scheme>

Additionally, **Federal Government support for Australian households** is available:

<https://www.energy.gov.au/energy-sector-response-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/information-australian-households>

https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/Fact_sheet-Income_Support_for_Individuals.pdf

Energy Retailers – Strata Lots (individual lots)

A key and consistent message that energy retailers are issuing in the market is to communicate with your supplier. If you are having, or foresee, any difficulties paying your energy bills, please contact your retailer to discuss your personal situation. To find out more information, please see the following handy links to major Energy Retailers' websites regarding COVID-19 & hardship support programmes.

ActewAGL

<https://www.actewagl.com.au/support-and-advice/concessions-and-rebates/act-rebates/act-utilities-stimulus-payment-covid-19-support>

Alinta Energy

<https://www.alintaenergy.com.au/nsw/help-and-support/help-and-support/customer-support/fauxts-and-emergencies/covid-19/>

AGL

<https://www.agl.com.au/about-agl/media-centre/asx-and-media-releases/2020/march/agl-ceo-brett-redman-reassures-customers-we-are-here-to-help>

Energy Australia

<https://www.energyaustralia.com.au/home/bills-and-accounts/hardship-policy>

Momentum Energy

<https://www.momentumenergy.com.au/blog/covid-19>

Origin Energy

<https://www.originenergy.com.au/coronavirus.html>

Simply Energy

<https://www.simplyenergy.com.au/covid-19-response>

Please visit the smaller retailer's website direct where applicable.

Patience Needed

Many Australians are in the same boat with respect to job losses. Energy retailers are also affected by COVID-19 impacting staff availability.

The Energy & Water Ombudsman of NSW has also highlighted that some wait times for energy retailers' responses may be longer than usual – especially with phone contact. Consider alternative communication channels such as Apps or Live Chat functions.

Energy Retailers - Strata Plans (common energy bill)

Hardship programmes relate to residential accounts. As such, non-residential energy bill payments require a different approach.

As we are all aware, the federal government has released the stimulus packages to support the Australian economy. However, Strata Plans are not quite a business and not quite a resident. Where do they fit in? We are presently in discussion with a range of retailers to obtain suitable advice moving forward.

Summary

For lot owners and tenants, reach out to your retailer or review the applicable Government websites (some of the main ones listed in this fact sheet). There are a number of policies in place covered by the retailer or via existing legislation.

As we are all aware, the COVID-19 response and information available is fluid and changing daily. We will update you all when more is known, or if there are substantive changes to this Fact Sheet.

To find our more information about Government programmes, please see the following links:

<https://www.energy.gov.au/energy-sector-response-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/information-australian-businesses>

<https://www.business.gov.au/Risk-management/Emergency-management/Coronavirus-information-and-support-for-business>

<https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus>

Disclaimer: Strata Energy Services has prepared this Fact Sheet in good faith (noting information current as at 26/03/2020), following publicly available information and in discussion with numerous retailers. We do not speak on behalf of any retailers, rather we seek to provide this Fact Sheet to assist owners and tenants to be informed.