

## 2.04 Electricity and Gas Meters

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Most residential properties in Western Australia have a Western Power meter for recording the amount of electricity that is used by the occupants. In such circumstances Western Power is responsible for maintaining the meter and other equipment such as electricity poles. Synergy is the company which deals with the bills generated from use of the electricity meter.

Most city and town houses also have an Alinta Gas meter for recording gas usage. Note that for many rural properties, there may be a gas connection to the premises but no gas meter as occupants are expected to purchase their own gas supply in the form of gas cylinders which are then delivered to the premises.

### Getting connected

Before moving into your new place, make sure to contact Synergy (Ph: **13 13 53**) and Alinta Gas (Ph: **13 13 58**) direct in order to get electricity and gas connected to your new premises. Usually the person whose name is on the tenancy agreement is the one to make these arrangements, although you can list more than one person as the account holder (a good idea if you are sharing a house). Be aware that there will be an “account application” (connection) fee charged for getting gas and electricity turned on to your house.

Both Synergy and Alinta Gas have customer charters which provide guidelines on their service standards. For example, Synergy’s customer charter states that new connections are to be completed within 2 business days for metro areas and 6 business days for rural areas.

In some situations Alinta Gas are requiring that a copy of the written tenancy agreement be lodged with them prior to the gas being connected. This is particularly for when the gas has been previously disconnected at the rental property due to non-payment by previous tenants, or when the new tenant has outstanding debts with Alinta Gas. This requirement can create problems for tenants if they have a verbal rather than written tenancy agreement. In this case, Alinta Gas will accept a copy of the bond lodgement certificate as issued by the Bond Administrator in lieu of the tenancy agreement. Contact the Department of Commerce for assistance with this (Ph: **1300 304 054**).

Be sure to get the electricity and gas disconnected and your account cancelled when moving out of your rental premises. Both Alinta Gas ([www.alinta.net.au](http://www.alinta.net.au)) and Synergy ([www.synergy.net.au](http://www.synergy.net.au)) have online facilities for opening and/or closing an account.

### Paying the bills

Electricity bills are sent to the account holder usually every two months. Gas bills are sent usually every three months. If you are a pensioner and/or hold a Health Care Card, you may be eligible for discounted rates for your electricity supply charge. Check with Synergy (Ph: **13 13 53**).

There are a number of payment options for paying your electricity or gas bill. These options are listed at the bottom of your bill statement. Be aware that with BPay (payment arranged directly from your bank account), there may be a time lapse of 2-3 days before the account is actually paid.

If you are having difficulties paying your bill on time, try contacting Synergy or Alinta Gas BEFORE the bill's due date to arrange a payment option that suits you (for example, paying it off in instalments). If you fail to pay your bill on time, the gas/electricity may be disconnected and you will have to pay a reconnection fee to have it put on again.

### **Check your tenancy agreement**

Most tenancy agreements/leases will include clauses about the use and supply of electricity and gas. REIWA's (Real Estate Institute of Western Australia) standard tenancy agreement and some other tenancy agreements often contain a clause stating that "the tenant agrees to comply with all the rules and by-laws governing the use of the premises and the common areas issued by the owner, strata company or strata council". These rules may include paying "common area" electricity (particularly if you are renting a flat) and/or gas charges and service fees.

### **Service management fees**

Owners/agents sometimes arrange the electricity and gas accounts on behalf of the tenant/s. This can sometimes result in owners/agents charging tenants an extra "service" or "management" fee for each utility bill they send to tenants. This is sometimes also referred to as a "utilities service charge". Such charges may actually be illegal regardless of whether or not they have been written in as a special condition in the lease. If you are being charged an extra service or management charge or fee on top of your electricity and/or gas actual usage, contact the Department of Commerce (Ph: **1300 304 054**).

### **Shared meters**

Some properties may have only one electricity or gas meter which is shared between several dwellings, for example, duplexes or properties with a house and a granny flat. In such situations, the division of electricity and gas charges may not be shared equally. It is important to clarify with the owner/agent the situation regarding shared meters BEFORE you sign the tenancy agreement.

### **Common charges**

Charges are sometimes made for the supply of electricity to common areas, especially if you are living in a flat or villa situation. Common areas may include a shared laundry/kitchen/bathroom, reticulation for shared gardens, and/or outside lights. The common area electricity or gas should be on its own sub-meter, and the total for that meter divided evenly between all dwellings.

### **Sub-meters**

Properties that have multiple dwellings such as units, town houses, flats and/or duplexes, often have a master meter/sub-meter system. In this situation, Synergy or Alinta Gas measures the total electricity or gas supplied to the building by reading the master-meter, and then sends a bill for the total electricity/gas consumption to the holder of the master-meter.

Each unit or flat still has its own sub-meter which should be read at the same time as the master-meter reading. The sub-meters are usually read by the owner, agent or caretaker of the complex. The master-meter bill should then be divided up between each dwelling according to each dwelling's individual consumption.

Tenants need to be aware of the following problems associated with sub-meters.

- Electricity supplied to the master-meter is charged per unit at a price set by Synergy. However, Synergy has no control over the price charged per unit consumed once the electricity leaves the master-meter. This means that owners/agents may set the price per unit themselves, and may charge more per unit than Synergy. The same applies to Alinta Gas supply charges.
- If you think you are being overcharged for electricity or gas, ask the person who is billing you to explain how the bill was calculated. If you have a sub-meter, it is a good idea to also ask for a copy of the total (master-meter) bill. If the owner/agent is refusing to provide information regarding the calculation of sub-meter charges, contact Tenants' Advice Service (metro: **9221 0088**; country: **1800 621 888**) or the Department of Commerce (**1300 304 054**).
- Many owners/agents charge each tenant for the preparation of their bill. This may be called a service or utilities management fee. Such extra charges may be illegal (see previous section about this).

**Tenants renting a property with a sub-meter should check to see how their bill is being calculated.**

### **Residual Current Devices (RCDs)**

RCDs are safety devices which monitor the flow of electricity from the main switchboard. They prevent electrocution by stopping the electricity supply if a problem with the electricity current occurs. From 9 August 2009, an owner must ensure that at least 2 RCDs are installed on the switchboard of the property before a new residential tenancy agreement is signed. For properties with an existing tenancy, owners have until 8 August 2011 to ensure the RCDs are fitted. Penalties apply for failing to comply with this requirement. (*Electricity Regulations 1947*, ss 14-17).

### **Smoke Alarms**

From 1 October 2009, an owner must ensure that smoke alarms are fitted within 14 days after the start of a new residential tenancy agreement. For properties with an existing tenancy, owners have until 1 October 2011 to ensure that smoke alarms are fitted. Any smoke alarm fitted has to be replaced after 10 years. Penalties apply for failing to comply with these requirements. (*Building Regulations 1989*, ss38I-38Q).

The number of smoke alarms that must be installed in the property depends upon the design of the property, for example the number of bedrooms and where they are located. Further information is available from Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia (FESA), phone: **9323 9816**, website: **www.fesa.wa.gov.au**.

Generally the smoke alarms are required to be connected to the mains power supply, however in certain circumstances a battery powered smoke alarm can be fitted. The local government for the area where the property is located is responsible for approving the installation of battery powered smoke alarms.