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Qualifying conditions for our schemes change from time to time. Always check with your local social welfare office to see if qualifying conditions have changed or contact our Information Services at (01) 704 3000.

The information in this booklet is correct at the time of going to print.

1. Who is this code of practice for?

This code of practice is for people on social welfare or Health Service Executive payments who, because of exceptional circumstances, cannot pay their electricity or natural gas bills. It outlines the programme of support available from the ESB, Bord Gáis and the Health Service Executive Community Welfare Service.

2. What do you count as exceptional circumstances?

People mainly find it difficult to pay their electricity and natural gas bills because they have used more electricity or gas than normal, for example, or because another unexpected exceptional situation, such as repairs to a car following an accident, prevents them from reasonably paying their bills. In these cases, local offices of the Health Service Executive may offer an exceptional needs payment, if appropriate.

Another reason is that customers may face more complicated problems with debts, in which case they need a longer-term solution.

3. Who do I contact if I cannot pay my electricity or gas bill?

You should first contact the ESB or Bord Gáis. They can agree a plan for you to repay your bill that will take into account your income and personal or family situation. For this to work, you should agree to measures recommended by the ESB or Bord Gáis or the Health Service Executive. These measures might include 'Easypay' options, ESB budget control units and taking part in the Household Budget Scheme. This scheme is a service operated for this Department by An Post.

4. How can the Health Service Executive help?

If the company cannot agree a payment plan with you, it may ask you to contact your local office of the Health Service Executive or it may contact the Health Service Executive for you with your agreement.

If appropriate, the local office of the Health Service Executive may give you an exceptional needs payment. This means neither you nor the local office of the Health Service Executive would need to deal anymore with the company about your difficulties in paying your bill.

If the local office of the Health Service Executive decides you need longer-term support, it will contact the company to say it is helping you and will arrange a plan with the company for you to repay your bill.

As part of this plan, the local office of the Health Service Executive may give you an exceptional needs payment, if appropriate, and the company will agree not to cut off the electricity or gas supply for a certain period.

If necessary, the local office of the Health Service Executive may also refer you to a support service offered by the Health Service Executive or another agency.

Note

An exceptional need does not usually include only arrears on a bill. The local office of the Health Service Executive may only consider making an exceptional needs payment by taking your family situation into account.

5. What happens if I cannot keep to my repayment plan?

If you cannot keep to an agreement made under this code of practice, contact the company. If the company can see that you are not keeping to the repayment plan, they may already decide to contact you to avoid arrears building up.

If you cannot sort out this matter with the company, it may contact the local office of the Health Service Executive.

Note

The local office of the Health Service Executive does not have to draw up a new agreement for you if you have not made a reasonable effort to keep to the repayment plan.

6. Will my electricity or gas supply be cut off?

If you agree and keep to a repayment plan, your supply will not be cut off. A company will only cut off supply as a last resort, when all other arrangements with you have failed.

If your supply is cut off, the company will agree a plan with you, taking your financial situation into account. If a plan is agreed, your supply will be reconnected the same day, if possible.

7. Can I make any other credit agreements with the company?

No. While you are repaying your bill under a plan made under this code of practice, you cannot apply for any hire purchase or other credit agreement with the company.

8. Does the code of practice cover business debts?

No. Electricity and natural gas debts incurred by a business are beyond the scope of this code of practice.

9. Where can I get more information?

The ESB and Bord Gáis can offer you advice on using electricity and natural gas economically. They can also work with the Health Service Executive and welfare groups to advise customers how to use fuel efficiently.

10. Points to note

The code of practice is based on an understanding that customers will pay their bills from their social welfare or Health Service Executive payment.

The code of practice also recognises that the ESB and Bord Gáis must collect bill payments efficiently, despite the difficulties experienced by customers because of debt.



You can get independent information on rights and entitlements to all social services from your local Citizens Information Centre.

The service is free, confidential and independent.

Citizen information is available from over 220 locations nationwide. The contact details and opening hours of your nearest Citizens Information Centre are listed in the Golden Pages. Alternatively, LoCall Citizens Information Phone Service on 1890 777 121 or log on to www.oasis.gov.ie

Citizen Information Services are funded by Comhairle, who are responsible for the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy on social and civil services to the public. Comhairle is a statutory agency supported by the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

