



**Minister Announces Details Of Improvements In Household  
Benefits Package**

***Over 340,000 People To Be Protected From Energy Price  
Increases - Brennan***

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., today revealed the details of improvements to the household benefits package announced yesterday by the Taoiseach to protect recipients from the increased cost of gas and electricity.

Minister Brennan said that the present entitlement of 1,800 free units of electricity per annum will be increased to 2,400 free units per annum, in addition to payment of the standing charge. This increase will be effective from 1 January 2007. There will also be pro rata increases in the gas allowances for the 26,000 customers who avail of that allowance and this will be effective from 1 October 2006.

The Commission for Energy Regulation has announced increases of 33.8% in domestic gas from October 2006 and proposes an increase of 19.4% in domestic electricity from January 2007.

"There are 315,000 customers availing of free electricity units and of those, 271,000 use all their present allocated units. The value of the present number of free units to each of our customers is €260 per annum," the Minister said. "However, when account is taken of the increased cost and the increased number of free units, the value to each customer will now be in the region of €414 per annum."

The increased cost of the free gas allowance scheme to this Department will now be €3.5 million in a full year with the cost of the price increase alone coming to €2.9 million. The increased free electricity units are estimated to cost the Department €46 million in a full year with the cost of the price increase alone amounting to €15 million.



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The Household Benefits Package, costing €261 million per annum, comprises of the Telephone Allowance, Electricity/Natural Gas Allowance and Free TV Licence, and is available to people living in the State aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test.

It is also available to carers and people with disabilities under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments and to all people aged 70 years and over, regardless of their income or household composition.

**Ends**

### **Note to Editors:**

Please see detailed note on Household Benefits Package attached for information.



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### **DETAILED NOTE ON HOUSEHOLD BENEFITS PACKAGE**

The following allowances are covered under the household benefits:

#### ***Allowance 1***

- **Electricity Allowance** which covers normal standing charges and up to 1,800 units of electricity each year. There are 315,000 clients availing of free electricity units of which 271,000 use all their allocated units.

or

- **Gas Allowance** –which covers the supply charge and up to 1,674-kilowatt hours (Kwh) per annum. There are 26,000 clients availing of the gas allowance (figures are not to hand as to usage)

**New increases to 2,400 units of electricity and pro rata increases in gas allowance. The increases in gas allowance will be effective from 1 October 2006 and the electricity from 1 January 2007.**

#### ***Allowance 2***

- Telephone Allowance

#### ***Allowance 3***

- Free Television Licence

#### **Who can qualify?**

The Household Benefits package, which comprises the Electricity/Gas Allowance, Telephone Allowance and free Lifetime Television Licence, is available to people living permanently in the State.

- People aged over 70 years of age can qualify regardless of their income or household composition.
- The package is also available to Carers.
- Customers under age 70 who are in receipt of a qualifying payment (below) and live alone or only with certain excepted categories of people may also have an entitlement to the package
  1. Old Age Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension
  2. Retirement Pension
  3. Blind Pension
  4. Widow's or Widower's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension
  5. Invalidity Pension
  6. Deserted Wife's Benefit or Allowance
  7. One-Parent Family Payment
  8. Prisoner's Wife's Allowance
  9. an **ordinary** Garda Widow's Pension from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
  10. an equivalent Social Security pension or benefit from a country covered by EC Regulations, or from a country with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement



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For those customers aged between 66 and 69 years and who are not in receipt of a qualifying payment, a means test must be satisfied to determine eligibility for the package.

### **Qualifying payments for persons aged under 66**

1. Invalidity Pension
2. Blind Pension
3. Unemployability Supplement or Workmen's Compensation with Disablement Pension (for at least 12 months)
4. Disability Allowance
5. an equivalent Social Security Pension or Benefit from a country covered by EC Regulations, or from a country with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement

### **Special Conditions for Widows/Widowers aged between 60 - 65**

A widow or widower, aged 60 to 65 inclusive, may qualify for the Household Benefit Package if their late spouse was getting a Telephone Allowance, Electricity, Natural Gas or Bottled Gas Refill Allowance **or** Free Television Licence from the Department and before their death they were permanently living together.

The widow/widower must be in receipt of one of the following payments:

1. Retirement Pension (payable at age 65)
2. Widow's or Widower's Contributory Pension
3. Widow's or Widower's Non-Contributory Pension
4. One-Parent Family Payment (Widows or Widowers)
5. Widow's or Widower's Pension under the Occupational Injuries Benefits Scheme.