

CONSUMER CHECKLIST

Energy Consumer Guide



This **energy consumer guide** provides lots of useful information about your domestic electricity or gas supply in **Northern Ireland**.



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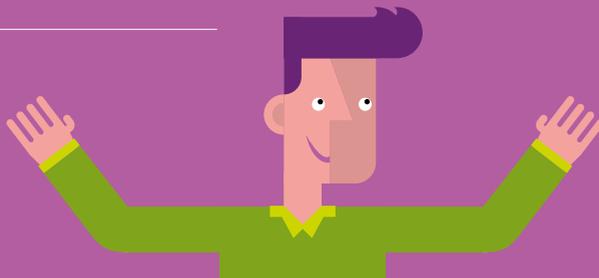


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The information in this guide is a summary of the more detailed European Consumer Checklist, which is available on our website www.uregni.gov.uk.



1. Getting Connected to the Electricity or Gas Network



Electricity

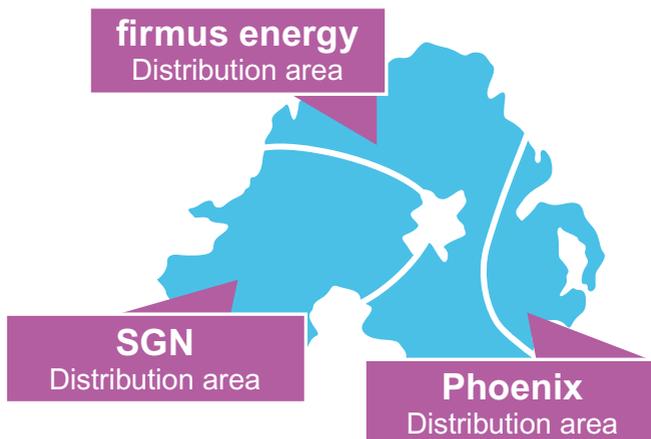
If you want to connect your home, business or renewable generation equipment, such as a wind turbine, or solar panel, to the electricity network, you will need to contact NIE Networks Ltd. They will explain the process and provide an application form. You can find this information on their website at www.nienetworks.co.uk or call NIE Networks on 03457 643 643 to request a form.

It is important to plan ahead as the connection process may take several months to complete.

You have a choice of who designs and builds your electricity connection, however there are still some specific parts of the connection that NIE Networks must do. A list of the accredited electrical contractors who can carry out the rest of the work can be provided to you by NIE Networks or via their website www.nienetworks.co.uk.

Natural Gas

The natural gas network in Northern Ireland is growing, however gas is not available everywhere. Three separate companies are building the gas pipes in Northern Ireland as shown on the map below:



If you want to check if gas is available to your property, contact the gas company in your area:

- ✓ firmus energy (Distribution) Ltd at www.firmusenergy.co.uk or phone 0800 032 4567.
- ✓ Phoenix Natural Gas Ltd at www.phoenixnaturalgas.com or phone 03454 55 55 55.
- ✓ SGN Natural Gas (Distribution) www.sgn.co.uk or phone 0800 912 1700.

Contact details for all electricity and gas companies, as well as useful numbers for other organisations can be found on the Utility Regulator and the Consumer Council websites, or you can phone the Consumer Council on 0800 121 6022.

2. Understanding Payment Methods and Bills



You should look at the options available to you and choose how you want to pay or select the meter type that suits you best.

If you choose a credit meter, you will receive a bill and can pay by direct debit, cash, cheque or card at your local post office. Customers who have decided to have a credit meter will receive a regular bill (paper or electronic) from their supplier. The following customer details should be on the front of the bill:

- ✓ Name of the customer;
- ✓ Account number;
- ✓ Billing address;
- ✓ The billing period to which the bill relates;
- ✓ Total charges for this period (including VAT);
- ✓ The date that any payment is due; and
- ✓ Customers tariff information¹.

¹ Customer's tariff information should include (a) the full name of the customer's tariff (in all cases where the tariff has a name); (b) the unit rate of the customer's tariff – expressed in "pence per kWh" where applicable; and (c) any discount or premium that applies to the tariff when compared to the supplier's standard tariff (where applicable for the same payment method).

A keypad or pay as you go meter allows you to pay for your electricity or gas by using 'top ups' purchased with cash from the Post Office or using PayPoint or Payzone at your local outlet. You can also top up your electricity by contacting your supplier by phone, while some suppliers also have an app you can use.

3. Switching Supplier

All electricity consumers in Northern Ireland can switch their electricity supplier. Currently only gas consumers in the Phoenix Natural Gas area can switch gas suppliers.



By switching supplier you could save money on your energy bills or receive better service. Switching is easy and hassle free and your electricity or gas will not go off. You have 14 days cooling off period to cancel the switch if you change your mind.

You can compare prices on the Consumer Council's interactive, independent energy price comparison tool. It is available at www.consumerCouncil.org.uk or you can call 0800 121 6022 for free independent advice.

Things to check before switching:

- If there is an offer, how long will it last?
- What happens when the contract ends?
- Are there any costs or penalties involved, for example if you leave the contract early?
- Remember to always read the full terms and conditions very carefully before agreeing a contract with a supplier.

If you don't want to switch supplier, you could still save money on your energy bills. Speak to your supplier as they may be able to offer you a better deal or give you a discount for changing your payment or billing method. Being more energy efficient will also help you reduce your electricity and gas bills. Contact your supplier to ask for some ideas on how to do this.

4. Interruptions to your Electricity or Gas Supply



There may be times when your supply of electricity and/or gas is interrupted.

If your electricity supply goes off, you should contact NIE Networks on 03457 643 643 to inform them of the fault. They will be able to update you on when the electricity is likely to be restored. You can also visit their website (www.nienetworks.co.uk) for updates.

If you are dependent on life supporting electrical equipment you should join NIE Networks Critical Care Register. NIE Networks will keep those consumers on the register up to date if there is a power interruption and will give you notice in advance if they plan to interrupt the electricity supply.

If your gas supply is interrupted, you should contact your supplier. If you smell gas, you should turn off the emergency control valve in the meter box and contact the 24-hour Gas Emergency Service immediately on 0800 002 001.

5. How to Complain



You can make a complaint about your energy supplier if you are not satisfied with any part of their service. Follow the steps below to make your complaint:

Step 1 – Complain directly to your energy supplier. Most suppliers will acknowledge and attempt to resolve your complaint within 10 working days. Energy suppliers are required to resolve all complaints within three months.

Step 2 – There may be occasions when your electricity or gas supplier has not been able to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction or you have not received a response. If your complaint is not resolved after step 1, get in touch with the Consumer Council. The Consumer Council has the power to

investigate your complaint independently and free of charge. You can contact the Consumer Council on 0800 121 6022 or email: contact@consumercouncil.org.uk.

6. Energy Efficiency

You can save money on your electricity and gas bills if you reduce the amount of energy you use. Your supplier will be able to give you information to help you become more energy efficient. You can also contact Bryson Energy on 0800 1422 865 for free information and advice.



7. Other Useful Information

- If you are leaving your house or moving to a new property you must let your electricity and gas supplier know as soon as possible and provide meter readings. This will ensure you only pay for the energy that you used.
- If you are finding it difficult to keep up with your energy bills you should contact your supplier as soon as possible.
- If you are repaying debt using a prepayment meter, suppliers can take no more than 40% from the amount you top-up to pay off the debt.
- If you are a pensioner, have a disability, or are chronically sick, there is additional assistance that you can receive free of charge. All you have to do is contact your supplier and sign-up to their customer care register.
- You can find out more about your rights when dealing with electricity and gas suppliers in the Energy Supplier Codes of Practice. These set out minimum standards on consumer protection which energy suppliers must meet. Visit your suppliers website for more information or contact the Consumer Council on 0800 121 6022.



For more information on the European Consumer Checklist or if you have any queries about this guide, please contact:



The Consumer Council, Seatem House,
28 - 32 Alfred St, Belfast BT2 8EN

T: 0800 121 6022

E: contact@consumercouncil.org.uk

W: www.consumercouncil.org.uk



Utility Regulator
Queens House
14 Queen Street
Belfast BT1 6ED

T: 028 9031 1575

E: info@uregni.gov.uk

www.uregni.gov.uk



The Utility Regulator is responsible for regulating the electricity, gas, water and sewerage industries in Northern Ireland.