

Your home energy checklist

Follow these steps to help you manage your energy bills and keep your home warm.



1. Take a meter reading

Take regular meter readings and submit them to your energy supplier as this will help you keep an eye on your energy use and keep your bills accurate.

If you receive a bill and it has an 'E' marked against the meter reading, then this means it is 'estimated' by your supplier. You may not be paying the right amount for your energy. Having several estimated readings can sometimes lead to large, unexpected bills. Meters are read from left to right. Don't include any numbers that are red or in a red box.



2. Contact your supplier to discuss your energy debt

If you are in debt to your energy supplier and struggling to get on top of it, then speak to your supplier as soon as possible. If they know there is a problem, they can work with you to find a solution.

Ask to set up a payment plan and be realistic about what you can afford to repay. You don't want to leave yourself short for other essential bills. You can also get advice on energy debt from AdviceNI.

3. Maximise your income

Make sure you are claiming the correct benefits. This could increase your income as well as make you eligible for other types of assistance.

Take advice from:

AdviceNI

0800 915 4604 | advice@adviceni.net

Make the Call Service

This service makes sure you're getting all the benefits, services and supports that you are entitled to.

0800 232 1271 | makethecall@dfcni.gov.uk

4. Check if you can receive other discounts and payments

If you were born on or before a specific date (this date changes each year) you could get between £100 and £300 to help you pay your heating bills.

This is known as a 'Winter Fuel Payment'. It is paid automatically between November and December if you have claimed before or are in receipt of some other benefits. Others will need to apply for it.

For more information call **The Winter Fuel Payment Centre** on 0800 7310160

In addition, some households could be eligible for a Cold Weather Payment of £25 per qualifying week. This is paid automatically to those on certain benefits when the average temperature in their area is recorded as, or forecast to be, zero degrees celsius or below for seven consecutive days. You'll get £25 for each seven-day period of very cold weather between 1 November and 31 March.

5. Register for priority service

You can sign up to a Customer Care Register to receive extra help from your energy supplier as well as from your distribution network operators (the companies that operate and maintain your gas and electricity supplies).

You can receive the services available if you:

- are of pensionable age;
- are disabled or chronically sick;
- have a hearing or visual impairment; or
- additional communication needs.

Each energy supplier and network operator maintain its own register. A wide range of support is available including:

- information provided in accessible formats;
- advance notice of planned power cuts;
- identification scheme and password protection;
- nominee scheme for a family member or carer on behalf of the customer;
- priority support in an emergency;
- free meter move for consumers with disabilities or are of pensionable age on request; and
- free gas safety check or boiler service meter reading services.

Contact your gas/electricity supplier and distribution network operator for more information and to register. Details of your distribution network operator can be found on your energy bill.

6. Check to see if you are getting the best deal for your energy

You could save money on your energy bills by switching supplier or changing tariff. The Consumer Council has a free independent energy price comparison on its website. By using this tool you can compare all available electricity and gas tariffs across Northern Ireland in one place. Have a copy of your most recent bill or annual statement to hand as this should tell you how much energy you have used in the past year.

www.consumercouncil.org.uk
028 9025 1600



7. Home heating oil

More than two-thirds (about 68%) of households in Northern Ireland are dependent on oil as their main heat source. Oil is normally cheaper when you purchase a larger quantity, however, this is not always viable for those who cannot afford the larger

volumes. Oil differs from natural gas and electricity and is usually delivered in bulk.

Payment methods:

Paying in advance

- Paying for bulk buy.
- Most suppliers will accept a direct debit or card payment or can have an account set up if you regularly use the same supplier.

Budgeting options

- Many suppliers can set up a regular direct debit plan spread throughout the year, often called a home heat plan.
- PayPoint – the majority of suppliers will accept PayPoint as this enables the customer to budget by topping up credit on a smart card at a PayPoint location throughout Northern Ireland, which is usually located at convenience stores. The minimum payment is £10.00.
- Saving stamps are available from certain Councils; check to see if they administer a saving stamp scheme.
- Oil stamps are like cash, so they need to be kept safe and cannot be refunded if lost.
- The Consumer Council survey home heating oil suppliers every week. You can use this tool to make sure you are getting value for money.

Oil buying clubs

- Oil buying clubs or 'brokering' schemes involve bulk buying in cluster areas, for example a street or local community. There are a number of clubs around Northern Ireland. Oil can be ordered through **NI Energy Advice Oil Buying Clubs**. **NI Energy Advice** take care of all aspects of the delivery.
- Providing monthly advice on oil costs and the best time to buy heating oil.
- To find a club near you, contact us at:
Tel: (028) 95 98 2068 or (028) 95 98 3316
Text: 079 3984 3716
Email: oilbuyingclubs@nihe.gov.uk

8. Use your heating and hot water controls effectively

Make sure you are using your boiler and heating controls correctly and use the programmer to set up the system to match your heating and hot water needs.

For example, setting your heating to come on half an hour before you get up in the morning and half an hour before you go to bed. If you are out during the day set a heating pattern that matches your needs.

Use a room thermostat to control the temperature in your home. Ideally this should be set between 18°C and 21°C in cold weather but some people may need it a little higher for comfort.

Remember not to leave electric hot water immersion heaters on for longer than you need as this wastes energy.



9. Use night storage heaters correctly

Some homes have night storage heaters. These store heat overnight when electricity is cheaper, which is then released throughout the next day. Homes with storage heaters should be on an Economy 7 tariff.

If you are not using your storage heaters correctly you could be faced with a large bill.

For more advice look online at www.nea.org.uk/advice-support/information-leaflets

10. Make your home energy efficient

- Preventing draughts can be a cheap way of making your home warmer. Draught-proofing products are available at DIY stores.
- Close curtains at dusk to keep the heat in and use thermal underlay beneath carpets.
- Loft and cavity wall insulation can also make a big difference to bills and comfort, as can replacing an old boiler.
- You may be eligible for free or discounted insulation or boiler replacements.

Energy Advice offers free independent and impartial energy advice to domestic householders in Northern Ireland - including advice about energy grants and other sources of help.

NI Energy Advice
0800 111 4455
nienergyadvice@nihe.gov.uk
www.nihe.gov.uk/Community/NI-Energy-Advice

9. Stay safe

Carbon monoxide is a deadly gas that cannot be seen, smelt or tasted. It can be produced by faulty fuel burning appliances in your home such as a gas boiler or gas fire/heater where there is poor ventilation.

Take the following steps to protect yourself and your family:

- Make sure that fuel burning appliances such as fires, boilers and gas cookers are regularly serviced by a qualified engineer
- For gas appliances, engineers must be Gas Safe registered. It is also recommended that engineers working on oil or solid fuel appliances are registered with a trade body such as OFTEC or HET-AS. Ask your engineer for proof of their registration.
- Install an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm. These can be bought from DIY stores, supermarkets and high street shops; they cost around £15 and could save lives.

Know the danger signs. These are:

- Gas flames burning orange or yellow instead of the normal blue
- Soot stains on or above the appliance
- Coal or wood fires that burn slowly or go out.
- If you rent your home, then by law landlords have to carry out an annual safety check of gas appliances in the home and provide you with a Gas Safety Certificate. If you haven't already seen the certificate, ask your landlord for a copy. Contact your gas supplier to ask about registering with their Customer Services Register.

For further information on carbon monoxide safety go to www.co-bealarmed.co.uk.

If you smell gas, want to report a gas leak or require gas emergency services call the free, 24-hour **National Gas Emergency Helpline- 0800 002 001**.