

### **Billing Disputes**

**1. My gas and/or electricity bill is too high - what should I do?**

First, you must contact the [utility company](#) or [supplier](#) to try to resolve the problem. It is required by law to assist you. If you are not satisfied with the company's action, you may file a complaint with the Office of External Relations. (See [Complaint Procedures.](#)) Your complaint will be forwarded to the utility company for investigation and response.

**2. How will the Public Service Commission's Office of External Relations investigate my high bill dispute?**

The utility company provides the Commission's OER with information about your account to determine whether or not there is an obvious reason for the high bills. Often the utility will include a meter reading history or furnish copies of bills if not supplied by the customer so they can be examined. The OER representative will review the information that includes the utility's written response to determine if there was an obvious reason for the high bill, like colder temperatures. OER may require that the utility test your meter to ensure that it is operating accurately. The utility is only responsible for ensuring that your usage has been recorded properly and is registering accurately on a meter that has been approved by the PSC. OER's determination will be based on the accuracy of your meter and the meter readings.

**3. Does the utility have to prove that I am using the service that is billed?**

The utility can only measure the consumption of gas or electricity through an accurate meter. There are numerous variables which determine the amount of gas or electricity consumed at a residence, such as the efficiency of the heating/cooling systems and the appliances, the size of a residence, the home's insulation, the outside temperature, and the consumption patterns of the customer setting the thermostat. Therefore, utilities are not required to determine how the service was used, just if it was used and recorded by an accurate meter.

You are able to obtain from the utility's [website](#) tips for conserving energy and information on the energy efficiency and conservation programs that are available to you, including energy audits.

**4. What should I do if I suspect that my meter is faulty?**

If you suspect that your high bill may be due to your meter not registering your consumption accurately, then you may ask the utility to test your meter. The Code of Maryland Regulations ("COMAR") states that "upon request by a customer and at no charge, the utility shall make a test of the accuracy of registration of the meter serving him, provided that these tests need not be made more frequently than once in 18 months." COMAR also states that you (or your representative) may be present when the meter is tested. The results of the test shall be provided to you within a reasonable time after completion of the test and the utility must retain a record of the test for at least three years.

**5. Are there any options to me if I do not want my utility to test my meter?**

If you do not want the utility to perform the meter test, you may submit a written request to the Public Service Commission for a ["referee test."](#) Your request must include your name, address, daytime telephone number, name of your utility company and type of meter to be tested (gas or electric). You will be contacted by a Commission representative to schedule the test.

Your written request must be accompanied by a \$10.00 check or money order made payable to the Public Service Commission. You should address your request as follows:

Public Service Commission  
Engineering Division  
William Donald Schaefer Tower  
6 Saint Paul Street  
Baltimore, MD 21202-6806

If the results of the referee test reveal that the meter is not measuring electricity consumption within the PSC's prescribed 98% - 102% accuracy requirements, then a billing adjustment will be warranted for your account. Your \$10.00 payment will also be refunded to you. However, if the referee test confirms your electric meter is operating within the PSC's accuracy requirements, then no adjustment will be made to your account, and the PSC will retain the \$10.00 fee for the referee test.

## **6. Do I have to pay a bill that is estimated?**

You are responsible for paying your bill every month, whether the reading was estimated or based on an actual meter reading. If the reading is estimated, the utility must denote on the bill form that the reading is estimated, and the utility should have a record internally to indicate the reason for the estimate. If the estimates are due to no access to the meter, you should check to see if your utility can install a remote meter reading device that will allow them to read the meter remotely without having to gain access to the meter. If this is not an option, then you can obtain meter reading cards and/or phone in your reading to your utility. If the estimate is way out of line with your normal usage, you can request that the utility cancel the bill. However, if you do this just remember that the next bill will cover a two month period.

The Commission has improved installation of smart meters for BGE, Pepco and Delmarva Power. The smart meter is an electric meter that allows two-way communication between the meter and the utility via a wireless network. Smart meters should eliminate the need for the utility to estimate a bill. The smart meter identifies energy consumption in more detail than conventional meters. The utility will still determine how much electricity has been used from the data they retrieve from the smart meter and you will receive a bill at the end of each billing period.

**7. Am I required to pay an adjusted bill because the utility made a mistake?**

You are required to pay an adjusted bill. Maryland regulations permit a gas and/or electric utility to adjust a customer's bill and bill the customer retroactively for the following reasons:

- Malfunctioning meter
- Misapplication of the rate schedule
- Erroneous meter readings
- Incorrect calculation of charges
- Over or under-estimating of bills

**8. How far back does the utility have to go to refund me for an overcharge?**

The utility is required to refund the total overcharge for the period the discrepancy occurred unless the overcharge resulted from an incorrect reading of the meter since that amount is automatically corrected when the utility obtains a subsequent billing based on the correct meter reading.

**9. How far back can a utility bill me because of an undercharge that was their mistake?**

The utility is permitted to automatically bill you retroactively for undercharges which occurred more than 12 months before the discovery of the error. If the utility wants to seek retroactive billing over 12 months, but not more than 3 years, then the utility must seek authorization from the Commission. The utility must be able to show that the customer knew, or reasonably should have known, that the bills were in error. The utility's request to the Commission is to be in writing and shall also include the factual basis for the request, with copy to the customer that includes a notice of the customer's right to write to the Commission, within 20 days, if the customer is in opposition to the utility's request for retroactive billing over 12 months.

## **10. What kind of adjustment can I expect if my meter is found to be faulty?**

If the meter is tested and found to have over-registered more than 2 percent (fast meter), the utility is required to recalculate the bills for service of the last customer of record receiving service through the meter and make a refund as long as the amount of the adjustment exceeded \$1. The refund is to be for the period that the customer received service through the meter. If the date on which the error first developed can be established, the bills for service shall be recalculated from that time. However, if the time at which the error first developed cannot be established, it is assumed that the over-registration existed for a period of 3 years or a period equal to one-half of the time since the meter was last tested, whichever is less.

If the meter is found to be more than 2 percent slow, meaning it under-registered usage, the utility may bill the customer one-half of the unbilled error for a period of 12 months, unless the meter has been tested within that 12-month period, in which event the utility may bill the customer one-half the unbilled error for the period since the meter was last tested. However, if the amount of under-registration was less than \$5, the utility is prohibited from adjusting the bill.

[Back to FAQ Topics](#)