

Need help with energy?

Hello, I'm Ann Robinson,
Director of Consumer Policy at uSwitch.com.



Even though energy is an absolute necessity, it's a sad fact of life that many households struggle to meet their energy bills. For some this can be remedied by cutting back through energy efficiency measures and making sure they

are on the cheapest available energy deal.

But unfortunately, for others it means living with the harsh reality of fuel poverty – where ten percent or more of their household income is going on energy bills.

This factsheet is designed to raise awareness of some of these serious issues and to point people in the right direction so they can find out what help is available. We've also included details of the main points of contact for the energy industry, whether for concerns such as complaints, or for advice such as energy efficiency.

Ann Robinson

Simple energy efficiency steps

- Invest in energy efficient light bulbs – they cost more than ordinary light bulbs, but last longer and use less energy.
- Steer clear of power hungry gadgets such as electric heaters. Make sure that TVs, computers and CD players are not left on standby and switch off mobile phone chargers once your phone is charged - these are classic energy wasters.
- When going away for breaks make sure that all electric equipment is turned off – if possible go one step further and switch your power off at the mains.
- Ensure your house is properly insulated – 50% of heat lost from an average home is through loft space.
- Lower your thermostat by 1°C - this can cut 10% off your heating bills.

Facing fuel poverty

- Suppliers offer free services and other benefits to those who are of pensionable age, have a disability, are chronically sick or have a hearing or sight impairment. Contact your energy supplier or ask Consumer Focus for its 'Free services' leaflet to find out more about the Priority Services Register.
- Customers entitled to be on the Priority Service Register could enjoy benefits such as quarterly meter readings for those unable to read the meter themselves, free gas safety checks, special help if your gas supply is disrupted and advance notice if your electricity supply has to be turned off, third party billing and bills in a format suitable for you, such as Braille or audio tape – find out from your supplier whether you are eligible.
- Everyone over 60 should claim the Winter Fuel Allowance. But there may be other benefits and grants you are entitled to. Call SeniorLine to find out more: 0808 800 6565.
- Older people should also contact their local Age Concern to check they are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to.

Key energy contacts

Consumer Focus is the independent energy watchdog (www.consumerfocus.org.uk). Advice for individuals on energy is given by its Consumer Direct arm (08454 04 05 06).

Energy Saving Trust offers free, impartial and expert advice about making your home more energy efficient. Tel: 0800 512012 or find out more at www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

Ofgem (www.ofgem.gov.uk) is the industry regulator. Its site has a dedicated consumer section which contains useful information and advice.