



budgetenergy

Northern Ireland's **Electricity** Company

Code of Practice

on

Services for Prepayment Meter Customers

CODE OF PRACTICE ON SERVICES FOR PREPAYMENT METER CUSTOMERS

A prepayment meter is a meter with a keypad attached that lets you pay for your energy before you use it. You simply visit any retail shop or newsagent (with a Paypoint or Payzone terminal), go online or telephone us to buy credit. You will receive a 20 Digit top-up code which you then key into your meter to add this credit to your meter.

BENEFITS OF A PREPAID METER:

- No more bills – you just pay as you go!
- Free Installation
- A better way for you to control and monitor your electricity usage

DISADVANTAGES OF A PREPAID METER:

- Depending on where you live the outlets you currently use for vending/payment may change from your current supplier.
- Prepaid meters may not be suitable for customers with medical or special needs
- You need to check your meter regularly to ensure you remain in credit

TOP TIPS:

- Top up your credit regularly, even over the summer months
- Only use the emergency credit in an emergency
- Check your meter regularly to monitor your credit or debt balance
- Keep receipts for your own records
- Keep your card/MPRN number in a safe place
- Let us know when you move home

If you have a disability or sight impairment and where it is reasonable to do so, we can provide special controls or adaptors and/or reposition meters to enable you to operate the prepayment meter easily.

We cannot install a prepayment meter in a household where life support or critical care related medical equipment is required.

Please see our Code of Practice on Provision of Services for Persons of Pensionable Age or Disabled or Chronically Sick which can be found on our website or requested from our Customer Services Team free of charge.

BUYING CREDIT

You will be given a plastic top up card with your Keypad meter that contains your Premise number. You will need this to buy your electricity credit. Depending on where you live, as a Budget Energy customer you are able to top up at any Payzone/Paypoint outlet using your card. Only top up at an authorised outlet and never buy credit from anyone visiting your home. You can buy any amount of credit in whole pounds from £5 to a maximum of £175 per transaction. However, you should note that if you leave Budget Energy for any reason your options for payment may change, leftover credit will remain on the meter however.

You can find your nearest Payzone or Paypoint outlet and their hours of availability by searching with your town or postcode at www.payzone.co.uk/where and www.paypoint.com.

Alternatively you can top up using your credit/debit card at any time either online at www.budgetenergy.co.uk or by phoning our automated phone top up service on Freephone **0800 015 26 78** – please have your Keypad Premise Number to hand when using these methods. You can top up by a minimum of £10 per transaction using this method.

No matter which method you choose for buying credit you will be given a 20 digit top-up code. This must be entered into your meter in order to transfer the credit onto your meter using the following procedure:

1. Press the * button once on the keypad. The message Key Code will be displayed.
2. Key in all digits of your 20 digit Powercode. If you enter a wrong digit press the * Button to go back.
3. Once all the 20 digits are entered press the # button. The message Sending will be displayed. After a few seconds one of the following messages will be displayed:

Accepted – you will hear a ‘happy’ tone. The top up amount will appear, followed by ‘Account’ and the total credit on the meter.

Rejected – you will hear a ‘sad’ tone followed by one of the fault messages below. If this happens wait until the fault message clears and start again from Step 1.

Duplicate – you have entered this Powercode before and cannot use it again.

Incorrect – the Powercode has been keyed incorrectly or is for another property.

Error – you have missed a number or entered the Powercode too slowly

Block – the Powercode has been entered incorrectly five times in a row

Wrong Tar – the price of electricity has changed and you must enter the special 40 or 60 digit code (this is explained further in the paragraph called “Electricity Price Changes” below.

Credit HI – you have too much credit on your meter (the maximum amount that can be stored in your meter is £1,000). Wait a few days and try again.

You will also be given a copy of these instructions when your prepayment meter is installed. If you move into a house where there is already a prepayment meter installed you can request

a copy of these instructions to be posted out to you by contacting our Customer Services Team on **0800 012 11 77**. We are open 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday and 11am - 4pm Saturday.

If you need these instructions in a different format, e.g. another language, large print or Braille, Please contact our Customer Services Team on **0800 012 11 77**.

USING YOUR METER

Each button on your meter has a function if you press * before the number;

- # - Press to see amount of credit left
- 0 - Display test, time & date
- 1 - Credit time left in Days
- 2 - Cost of Previous Day/Week/Month
- 3 - Unit rate and number of units used
- 4 - Last 5 powercodes entered
- 5 - Total money entered into meter
- 6 - Electricity being used in KWH
- 7 - Standing charge
- 8 - Highest consumption in any half-hour + last 24hours + when
- 9 - Total units used

Then press # after entering any codes.

If you require further assistance please don't hesitate to contact our Customer Services Team.

QUERIES RE YOUR TOP UP & CREDIT

If you call us with a query we may need information from the receipt, so we recommend that you keep your receipts. If you have topped up over the phone don't worry as we will have a record on our system. When you switch supplier your credit should remain on the meter. Where your meter is replaced or you switch from a keypad meter to a credit meter your credit will transferred to the new meter or refunded as appropriated, this should be completed within 10 working days.

KEEP YOUR CARD IN A SAFE HANDY PLACE

Don't worry if you lose your top up card - just give us a call and we'll get you a new one free of charge as soon as possible.

In the meantime while you are waiting for your new top-up card you can buy your top ups over the phone by calling our Customer Services Team on **0800 012 11 77**. We are open 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday and 11am - 4pm Saturday.

PREPAYMENT METER CHARGES

Customers on our Keypad Standard 24h tariff are not charged a standing charge, however there may be charges applicable for the installation or removal of a pay as you go meter. For more information please do not hesitate to contact us on **0800 012 11 77**. We are open 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday and 11am - 4pm Saturday.

Customers on our Keypad Economy 7tariff will be charged a standing charge on a daily basis. In addition there may be other charges applicable for the installation or removal of a pay as you go meter. For more information please do not hesitate to contact us on **0800 012 11 77**.

Further details on our tariffs can be found on our website at www.budgetenergy.co.uk.

STANDARD OR ECONOMY 7 METER?

If, like most customers, you use most of your electricity during the day and don't use it to heat your home and produce hot water, you'll probably have a standard meter and your tariff will have a single unit rate.

If you use electricity at night to heat your home and produce hot water you probably have a two-rate meter, called an Economy 7 meter. The tariff for these meters has:

- a higher unit rate for electricity used during the day
- a much cheaper rate for units of electricity used during a 7 hour period at night

COLLECTING DEBT

If you've had a prepayment meter installed to help you repay a debt a percentage from each top up (up to a maximum of 40%) you buy will be allocated against the amount you owe us until your account is clear. This percentage is calculated based on your individual circumstances and your ability to pay. If you would like to set this at a higher percentage in order to repay your debt quicker, we can do this at your request. Times of lower consumption can be a good opportunity to repay your debt faster. If you check the displays on your meter regularly you'll see the debt amount reducing. We will inform you when all the arrears have been cleared and your meter will automatically stop reducing your top ups.

If you're having difficulty paying your debt and keeping your meter topped up, please contact us as soon as possible and we'll be happy to discuss some options with you to make paying back your debt easier.

For up to date information on your debt such as the current amount of debt, likely time the debt will be paid in full at current repayment levels or information on how we have agreed your repayment plan you can call us on **0800 012 11 77** and ask to speak to our Revenue Protection Team. We are open 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday and 11am - 4pm Saturday.

Please also see our Code of Practice on Payment of Bills which is available on our website or free of charge from our Customer Services Team

RUNNING OUT OF CREDIT

When your credit reduces to £1 (£2 for Economy 7) you will hear a low-volume warning sound for two minutes. Press any button to turn it off. The warning sound will be repeated every 30 minutes (but not between 10pm and 8am) until a button is pressed.

EMERGENCY CREDIT

Your prepayment meter has an emergency credit facility. When you turn the low credit warning sound off you will automatically get £1 emergency credit. If you have not turned the warning sound off your supply will switch off. Should this happen press any button and your £1 emergency credit will come on after a few seconds.

You should only use the emergency credit in an emergency. After you've used the emergency credit you'll have to pay it back the next time you top up your meter, including any debt

outstanding and standing charges that have built up while you've been using the emergency supply.

WHAT IF MY EMERGENCY CREDIT RUNS OUT?

To give you enough time to buy a top up 'Friendly Credit' is given automatically on:

- **Weekdays** – if your emergency credit runs out after 4pm, Monday – Thursday, the supply will stay on until 11am the following day.
- **Weekends** – if your emergency credit runs out after 4pm on a Friday, the supply will stay on until 11am the following Monday.
- **Holidays** – Friendly Credit will **not** run out on any of the following dates and your supply will stay on until *11am the following working day: 1st January, 17th March, 12th July & 25th December.

Remember the next time you buy electricity, the amount of Emergency Credit & Friendly Credit used will be deducted from your balance.

**All times stated are GMT – please add 1 hour during Summer Time.*

REPAYING EMERGENCY CREDIT AND DEBT

If your meter is in emergency credit mode it will stop collecting any standing charges and debt. The charges will build up on an hourly basis and must be repaid along with any emergency credit before your meter returns to normal credit mode.

If you don't top up your meter in time, your emergency credit may run out and your electricity supply will go off.

YOUR BUDGET ENERGY STATEMENT

We will email you a statement once a year that shows you how much electricity you've used and the payments you've made. Your statement may show payments you've made after the reading was taken and balance was calculated. If your statement says you are in credit, we will be using these payments to calculate your next statement. Your statement will also be available online at www.budgetenergy.co.uk Or can be posted to you when requested by calling our Customer Services Team on **0800 012 11 77**. We are open 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday and 11am - 4pm Saturday.

LOST YOUR SUPPLY?

If your electricity supply goes off, first check your meter. If you haven't already used your emergency credit you need to press any button on your meter to get your supply back on.

If you have already used your emergency credit you need to top up your meter, either using Payzone, by telephone or online with £1 more than the debt amount displayed on the meter.

If your supply is off but there is credit on your meter, there could be an internal wiring fault in your home. Check to see if your trip switches are set to 'On' in your consumer unit. If you aren't sure how to do this, or if the fault re-occurs or the trip switch fails to re-set, you'll need to contact a qualified electrician.

If the screen on your meter has no displays there may be a power cut in your area and your neighbours will be affected too. To report a power cut you need to call NIE Network's Emergency Fault number, which is: Tel. **08457 643 643**.

ELECTRICITY PRICE CHANGES

Top Up codes usually have 20 digits. However, when you buy a top up after a change in electricity prices you will be given a special 40 or 60 digit code. This will credit your Keypad meter with your top up amount and recalculate your credit using the new tariff rate. Your top up codes will go back to the 20 digit codes after this.

MOVING HOME

If you are moving out...

Remember not to top-up more than you need when you are making arrangements to move house. This will avoid unused credit being left on your keypad as Budget Energy are unable to refund meter credit.

Please leave the card for the meter for the new occupier to use – it won't work at your new address.

If you are moving in...

If there is no card for the meter, don't worry, just let us know and we'll get you a new one as quickly as possible. In the meantime you can still top up over the phone by calling our Customer Services Team on **0800 012 11 77**.

MOVING INTO A HOME WITHOUT A KEYPAD METER

If you'd prefer to pay by prepayment through a keypad meter please let us know – we can arrange to install a prepayment meter free of charge.

SAVE ENERGY, SAVE MONEY

Your meter allows you to check how much electricity you are using.

Button 1 – Tells you the 'number of days credit' left, based on the last week's usage. This is just a guide as you may use more or less electricity by the week. **REMEMBER** when your meter is first installed it will be one week before this display is accurate.

Button 2 – Pressing this several times tells you how much electricity used yesterday, last week and last month. Most meters store up to 13 months data.

Button 6 – This tells you how much electricity you are using now in kilowatts. You can then work out what each appliance uses. One kilowatt uses one unit of electricity over one hour.

By pressing Button 6 again some meters also display your consumption in £'s and pence.

Reducing the amount of electricity you can use can save you money. For tips and ideas on how you can save take a look at our Code of Practice on Energy Efficiency or for free energy saving advice call The Energy Saving Trust at **0800 512 012** or visit their website at www.est.org.uk.

GET IN TOUCH

If you have any questions about your prepayment meter or any complaints you can call our Customer Service Team on **0800 012 11 77**. We are here to help you 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday and 11am - 4pm Saturday.

When you call us we may ask you to give us information from your meter or payment receipt – so please have a pen and paper and some recent receipts to hand. Also try to be close to your meter while you're talking to us.

If you have an emergency when we are closed you will need to contact NIE Networks on Tel. **08457 643 643**.

We have lots of useful information on our website so take a look if you have any questions – just go to www.budgetenergy.co.uk.

And if you want to write to us our address is: Budget Energy Ltd, Energy House, 30-32 Springtown Industrial Estate, L'Derry, BT48 0LY

ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

If you are having difficulty in physically accessing your meter or top up facilities you can call our Customer Service Team on **0800 012 11 77** and we will do our best to find an alternative arrangement for you. We are open 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday and 11am - 4pm Saturday.

REMOVING OR RESETTING YOUR PREPAYMENT METER

From time to time meters may need to be changed/reset. These changes are carried out by NIE Networks. Prior to the change we will contact you to arrange a suitable time.

Budget Energy will endeavour to have the meter changed/reset within 5 days of contacting you. Any credit on the meter at the time of the change will be transferred to your new meter.