Commission for Energy Regulation
An Coimisiún um Rialáil Fuinnimh

PRESS RELEASE

CER launches new safeguards for electricity and gas customers

Monday 26 March 2007

The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) has today announced significant customer protection measures for household electricity and natural gas customers. The CER's guidelines which must be implemented by all electricity and gas suppliers (as well as the network operators) will ensure that customers can be confident of the quality of service being provided by their supplier. In the event that a customer is not satisfied with service quality, the CER requires that the companies have fair and reasonable complaints procedures in place.

Electricity and natural gas customers - particularly the elderly, customers relying on life support equipment and those with disabilities - will be afforded greater levels of consumer protection under the new guidelines launched today. The CER has required the gas and electricity companies to draw up Codes of Practice that will protect the rights of customers in the areas of Billing, Complaints Handling, Contract Terms and Conditions, Disconnection, Marketing and Vulnerable Customers. Furthermore the CER has also required these suppliers to prepare Customer Charters. These Codes of Practice and Customer Charters were launched in Dublin today (26 March).

Each company is now required to communicate its Codes of Practice and its Customer Charter to all of its domestic customers. The companies should also notify their customers of compensation and refund arrangements that apply if service quality standards are not met.

Some of the key safeguards put in place are as follows:

- Elderly people cannot be disconnected by their energy supplier between the winter months of November 1st and March 31st.
- Visually impaired people must be provided with an alternative means of communications such as Braille bills, talking bills or phone bills.
- People who are hard of hearing must be provided with either a minicom, text messaging or video service to receive their bills
- People relying on life support equipment in their homes cannot be disconnected under any circumstances.
- A register of vulnerable customers must be maintained by all electricity and gas suppliers.
- All customers must be notified directly of changes in pricing. Notification will take place in advance of any change.

- A second person may be nominated to receive energy bills on behalf of a vulnerable person
- Energy suppliers must facilitate payment options for residential customers experiencing genuine financial hardship and, where appropriate, engage with a financial/money advisor appointed by the customer

Today's launch indicates the CER's commitment to providing an open and transparent customer service charter to further protect all energy users, including the most vulnerable in society.

ENDS

For further information, please contact:

Paul Brandon
Tel: 01 – 4000800
Mob: 086 – 8537432

Or Ken Curran Communications

01 – 8533155
087 – 2904982

Note to Editors:

The CER is the independent regulator for the electricity and natural gas sector in Ireland.

Our Mission Statement is as follows:

In a world where energy supply and prices are highly volatile, the mission of the CER, acting in the interests of consumers is to ensure that:

- the lights stay on
- the gas continues to flow
- the prices charged are fair and reasonable
- the environment is protected, and
- electricity and gas are supplied safely