

It can hit you like a rock: The annual invoice for electricity or heating is unexpectedly high and the energy provider demands a lot of money. Two questions arise instantly: **How should I pay for this?** And: **Can that be true altogether?**

How should I pay for this?

Unfortunately, there is hardly ever a way to avoid paying the bill. You would have to prove that you have used less electricity, gas, or district heating than the amount being billed. On the one hand, this is usually impossible, on the other, wrong invoices or malfunctioning meters are rare. However, if you do suspect that the energy supplier has made a mistake please contact a relevant counselling centre (like us if you are in Vienna). What should be done otherwise?

If you are able to pay...

... **do pay** – even if that is really bitter. Then try to detect the reasons for the heavy bill so that next year there won't be another one!

Our info sheets can help you save energy and reduce your future bills: Find them on

<https://www.ebplus.at/>

> **Soziale Energieberatung**

It is crucial to be acquainted with these things:

The thermostatic valve (the automatic rotary button on the radiator)

Airing correctly

Saving Energy – Tipps for any flat

Specific for gas heaters:

Know exactly what your **room thermostat** does.

Have your **gas heater serviced** regularly.

Perhaps it is the **hot water** you pay a lot for?

Apart from these topics you find information on our website on how to save energy when using various electric devices!

If you cannot pay at the moment...

... **talk to the energy provider about the problem immediately.**

Call the service line – even if you should be put on hold in the waiting loop for a long time. Alternatively, write an Email or visit their customer centre personally (if they have one). Once you receive a reminder letter (in German: *Mahnung*) or if even a debt-collecting agency or a law office gets involved because the provider waits for the money, you face additional costs. If you explain your situation, the provider will usually suggest to split up the bill in several monthly instalments and give you more time for your payments.

What can you do if you are unable to pay an instalment?

Instalments must be paid on time. If you cannot do that, contact your energy provider before the instalment is due and explain your situation!

When you are at a dead end because...

- the energy provider wants its money and won't come towards you any more
- a debt-collecting agency or a law office is already involved and you cannot pay their claim
- electricity or heating has been cut off and you do not have the money to activate it again

For such emergencies, Vienna offers an *aid in special circumstances* (German: *Hilfe in besonderen Lebenslagen*). Please contact municipal department 40 (MA 40; Phone.: 01 4000 8040) and arrange an appointment with a social worker. For further places to seek advice, see also the next page. If you do not live in Vienna, inquire about similar services your community offers.

Can that be true altogether?

Did you just receive your first annual invoice in a new flat and are asked for a back pay ("Nachzahlung")? And on top of that, the regular instalments are going up as well?

When a new contract is made with an energy provider, it estimates how much electricity and gas or district heating the client is going to use in the first year.

Example: The provider knows that people who lived in the flat before you moved in, needed 2.000 kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity per year. One kWh costs 0,20 €. $2.000 \cdot 0,20 = 400$. The provider now estimates that you will also consume 2.000 kWh and charges 400 € for the year. You will pay this sum in four instalments of 100 € each (one instalment every three months). After one year your electricity meter gets checked. It turns out that you have not used 2.000 but 3.000 kWh. These 3.000 kWh cost 600 € as opposed to 400 €. The provider will do two things now:

1. It wants the 200 € that are missing (you have paid 4 times 100 already). The 200 € are the pay back.
2. It estimates that you will use 3.000 kWh in the next year as well. Because they cost 600 €, it will raise the quarterly rates: From now on you have to pay 150 € every three months.

Many providers will charge 350 € as a first rate and 150 € for the remaining three ones. The first rate includes the 200 € back pay. The same applies to gas and district heating bills: Your contract begins with an estimation and after one year it is checked whether you have paid too little or too much. If you paid too much because the estimation was too high, you get money back.

From year two of your contract onwards, every annual invoice is the base of the estimate for the next year. Because your personal consumption of energy is unknown when you move into a new flat, the first annual invoice is often a special one and unfortunately often includes a back pay!

Previous annual invoices were not so heavy and suddenly you are asked to pay a lot more?

Likely explanations are these:

- You have used the flat in a different way than before. For example: You spent more time at home and turned the heating up more often, a child was born, or someone moved in with you.
- The last winter was particularly cold and you had to use the heating more.
- There has been a rise of energy prices.
- Something is faulty that used to work fine (e.g. the heating, the hot water boiler, or a window).
- You purchased new electric devices (e.g. an electric heater, an air conditioner or an additional fridge).
- The meter was not checked (see page 3).
- You used to get the bill from your provider directly – now the property management has commissioned a contractor to read the meter and send you the invoice instead of the energy supplier itself. Do you suddenly receive your annual invoice from another firm without having changed the energy supplier? Companies such as *ISTA*, *Techem*, *Messtechnik* or *Malik Gert* tend not to charge little for their service.

Who may be able to help as well? – Institutions in Vienna

- Sozialberatung der Caritas
- Individuelle Spontanhilfe des Roten Kreuzes
- Sozialberatung der Volkshilfe
- Hilfe in besonderen Lebenslagen (MA 40)

Was your energy consumption estimated or did someone read your meter ?

Take a look at this *Wien Energie* annual invoice for gas it (similar with electricity and district heating):

Detailrechnung Gas

Netzkundennr.:
Energietarif: Gas O
Netztarif: Netzet
Zählpunkt:

Ableседaten
Zählernummer:

Zeitraum	Zählerstand alt	Zählerstand neu	Differenz	Faktor	Verbrauch
09.10.2020 - 31.12.2020	65.835 (H)	66.693 (H)	858 m ³	10,730	9.206 kWh
01.01.2021 - 10.03.2021	66.693 (H)	67.610 (Z)	917 m ³	10,710	9.821 kWh

H...Zählerstand rechnerisch ermittelt Wiener Netze Z...Zählerablesung durch Wiener Netze



These are meter readings of different days:

Oct. 10th 2020: 65.835
Dec. 31st 2020 / Jan. 1st 2021: 66.693
March 10th 2021: 67.610

The readings for Oct. 9th and Dec. 31st (=Jan. 1st) were estimated. „H“ stands for „estimated“, respectively „computationally determined“. This means **nobody was there to read the meter or the meter was not accessible on the day the reader came to check it.**

In this example, the meter was read only once: The 67.610 of March 10th are labelled „Z“ for „reading by Wiener Netze“

The fact that the figure of Dec. 31st (Jan. 1st) was estimated is not problematic but at the beginning and the end of the billing cycle (here Oct 9th and Mar. 9th) no estimates should be made but the reader be read properly!

According to this invoice, 858m³ of gas were used during the first billing cycle (Oct. 9th to Dec. 31st). That is the difference between the meter readings:

$$66.693 \text{ (reading December 31st)} - 65.835 \text{ (reading October 10th)} = 858$$

If the reading of October 10th was underestimated, for example, the actual consumption of gas was less than what is billed. Say, the meter showed 66.500 in reality:

$$66.693 \text{ (reading December 31st)} - 66.500 \text{ (reading October 10th)} = 193$$

In this case, 858 m³ of gas would have been billed whilst only 193 m³ were actually consumed in this time.

But: This means also that you have paid too little with you last annual invoice and that you make good for this now. In other words, it is possible that a particularly high annual invoice includes energy that you have used but that was not paid for in the previous year.

To avoid estimates, you can always inquire when the last reading of your meter was taken or when the next one is due. In Vienna, the *Wiener Netze* are most often in charge of this (Phone 050 128-10100). Sometimes other firms do this, too. If *Wiener Netze* are not in charge in your case they can tell you whom to contact.

If the meter is in your flat (as opposed to the hallway or the basement): You should make sure that someone is at home when the reader comes. You will receive a letter from the grid operator or a firm working on behalf of it announcing the date. If you cannot be there at that time: Give them a call and arrange an alternative appointment – or simply tell them on the phone what the meter shows!