

# First Time Energy Customer? The OEB is here to help!

Being responsible for rent or a mortgage payment and all of the associated bills can be overwhelming. There is a lot to understand. That's why the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) has put together a list of what every first-time energy customer should know.

If your utility costs (including energy costs) are **not** part of your rent, you'll be billed by either an electricity or natural gas utility, or both. Where you live determines which utilities provide your electricity and/or natural gas. Find out which utilities service your local area using the OEB's interactive [Service Area Map](#), and contact your local utilities to set up your accounts.

## Unit Sub-Meter Providers

- If you live in a condominium or apartment (multi-unit buildings and, sometimes, townhomes), your unit has its own individual meter and your electricity bill comes from a company other than the local utility, you are the customer of a **Unit Sub-Meter Provider (USMP)**.
- USMPs provide the meters within the building and bill customers in their respective units based on their individual usage.
- Your landlord could be the condo board, building owner or property manager and is called the "master consumer." The master consumer contracts with the USMP and decides the price plan for the property. The USMP then sets up accounts and bills the customer directly.
- Once your account is set up, bills will come directly to you as the "customer."
- Learn about the role [USMPs](#) play in providing electricity metering and billing services to multi-unit buildings.

## Consumer Protection

- Utilities and USMPs must follow **customer service rules** designed to protect consumers. There are additional rules to support low-income customers. [Learn more](#) about equal monthly payment plans, disconnection rules and security deposits, among other rules.
- Ontario has a **winter disconnection ban** period (November 1 to March 31). Natural gas and electricity utilities cannot disconnect your service for non-payment during these months. However, the OEB's winter disconnection ban does **not** apply to multi-unit buildings serviced by USMPs, although some may **voluntarily** comply.
- In the case of USMPs that do not voluntarily comply with the winter disconnection ban, it is the master consumer who makes the decisions on disconnection for non-payment. The disconnection is carried out by the USMP on behalf of the master consumer.

- **Beware of energy scams.** Never share your account information with anyone other than your utility. If someone knocks at your door requesting a home inspection, a someone calls or emails offering a service that demands confidential information, it's probably a scam. Go to [OEB.ca/scams](https://www.oeb.ca/scams) to learn more about how to protect yourself.
- The OEB has tools available on its [website](https://www.oeb.ca) to help you calculate your energy bills, understand the line items on your bill and choose an electricity price plan that is best for you. The site also has important information you should know if you are approached by an energy company about a retail energy contract.

## Energy Conservation

- Conservation programs are available to help customers reduce their energy use. Find out more by visiting your utility's website or [SaveOnEnergy.ca](https://www.saveonenergy.ca).

## Assistance Programs

- Having trouble keeping up with bill payments? There are several **financial assistance** programs that can help. To find out more, and to see if you qualify, go to [oeb.ca/billhelp](https://www.oeb.ca/billhelp).
- It is very important that you pay your bill in full if you move out of your residence. If you don't, you won't be able to close your account and your credit rating could suffer.
- The Ontario Electricity Rebate provides eligible customers with a rebate on the subtotal of their electricity bill. The rebate is automatic for most residential and small business customers and appears on bills as a separate line item. [Find out more](#).

## Questions/Complaints

- Got a **complaint** about your utility or USMP? [Contact us](#). The OEB can answer questions and may intervene with the utility on your behalf, if necessary.