

## Energy regulator says protecting vulnerable customers 'more important than ever'

Victoria's energy regulator says the coronavirus pandemic means ensuring energy companies do the right thing by customers is more important than ever.

The Essential Services Commission has released its 2020-21 energy compliance and enforcement priorities today, saying it will be even more active in protecting vulnerable customers.

The priorities focus on making sure energy companies comply with customer protection rules including providing access to flexible payment plans, debt deferral and energy price checks.

It will also act on issues with notification of planned outages, customers being switched without their consent, overcharging and upholding the rights of embedded network customers.

Commissioner Sitesh Bhojani says the compliance and enforcement program aims to hold energy companies to account so customers can have trust in the Victorian energy market.

"Being in lockdown and staying or working from home means the reliable and ongoing supply of energy as an essential service is more critical than ever," he said.

Mr Bhojani says the commission has adjusted its compliance and enforcement program to take the impact of the pandemic into account.

"With data showing energy demand for households has increased by 15 to 20 per cent during lockdown we are very concerned about energy bills rising while incomes for many are falling.

"We are also aware family violence has reportedly increased and more people working and schooling from home mean maintenance outages are more disruptive than ever," he said.

Commissioner Bhojani says the community can be confident the commission is working to uphold their energy rights.

"Over the past 18 months we have taken strong action to enforce the obligations energy companies have to their customers under our regulatory codes.

"Since November 2018, 10 energy businesses have paid penalties totalling \$2.45 million for alleged breaches of the rules," he said.

**Read our [energy compliance and enforcement priorities for 2020–21](#) on our website.**

**For further information call: Michelle Bryne, Head of Strategic Communication or 0437 677 385**