

## AusNet Electricity pays penalty for allegedly failing to notify customers of planned power interruptions

AusNet Electricity Services Pty Ltd has paid \$280,000 in penalties after allegedly failing to notify 36 customers of planned power interruptions.

AusNet reported to the commission that in March and April 2021, it failed to provide advance notice for two planned power interruptions in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. Two of those customers were registered with AusNet as requiring life support equipment that relied on electricity supply.

The Essential Services Commission issued 28 penalty notices in respect of AusNet's alleged 36 instances of failure to notify customers of the planned power interruptions.

Commission chair Kate Symons said distributors must have effective systems in place to manage planned outages and customer notifications.

"Performing maintenance is vital for the ongoing quality of supply, but distributors need to ensure customers are adequately informed of any periods when they will be without power," she said.

"This ensures customers can make alternative plans and not be suddenly left in the dark without heating or cooling, and, importantly for customers with specific health conditions, their life support equipment.

"Distributors are required to give customers at least four business days written notice of a planned interruption to electricity supply, pursuant to the Electricity Distribution Code."

In the first incident, 35 customers in Heathmont were not notified of a planned outage on 16 March 2021, that continued for more than seven hours.

In the second incident, one customer in Ferntree Gully was not notified of a planned outage that occurred on 21 April 2021. The customer was off supply for six and a half hours.

Commissioner Symons said that in both instances AusNet received phone calls from customers alerting them to the issue, however AusNet proceeded with its maintenance and the customers remained without power for up to seven hours.

**Editors' note:** The commission can issue penalty notices where it has reason to believe a business has committed an energy industry contravention. Payment of a penalty is not an admission of a contravention of its distribution licence.

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