

## Regulator keeps watch on energy retailers

The state's energy regulator has put Victorian energy companies on notice saying it will be keeping a close eye on the way they support customers at this difficult time.

The Essential Services Commission has sent a message to energy retailers, highlighting it will focus its annual audit program on how they are meeting their obligations to support customers who are having problems paying their bills or experiencing family violence.

The commission's director of energy Sarah McDowell says supporting customers who are doing it tough should be front of mind at this time.

We have written to energy businesses letting them know we will be using this year's audit program to check on how well they're meeting their obligations under the [energy retail code](#) as it relates to the [payment difficulty framework](#).\*

"Under our code, all customers are entitled to flexible payment options while those who cannot pay for their ongoing usage can have a six month hold put on their debt repayments," she said.

Under the rules, customers who are participating in a payment plan or receiving bill assistance cannot be disconnected or be subjected to debt collection.

Ms McDowell says the commission is also looking closely at how energy companies are supporting customers who are experiencing family violence.

"There have been multiple reports of the incidence of family violence escalating overseas as the coronavirus pandemic takes hold so we will be looking closely at how energy retailers have responded to [new obligations](#) which came into effect on 1 January this year.

These obligations require energy retailers to have a family violence policy that meets minimum standards, including providing training for frontline staff, and improving account security and privacy around debt management," she said.

These new rules are embedded in the energy retail code ([see Part 3A -Assistance for customers affected by family violence](#)).

More information about your energy rights in Victoria is available on the [commission's website](#).

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