

Simply Energy pays penalty for alleged wrongful disconnection of power to elderly woman

Simply Energy has paid a \$5000 penalty for the alleged wrongful disconnection of a visually impaired, elderly woman's power and consequently her heating during a cold snap earlier this year.

Evidence obtained by the Essential Services Commission showed the customer called Simply Energy in April 2021 to let them know she was moving to a new house in May, but the company inadvertently disconnected her power 18 days early.

Simply Energy says the mistake was due to human error but was issued with a penalty notice by the state's energy regulator.

The Essential Services Commission formed the view the company allegedly failed to meet its obligations under the energy retail code by not ensuring the disconnection occurred in accordance with the customer's request.

Commission chair Kate Symons says the disconnection of the electricity supply to the woman's home was unexpected and caused the woman significant distress.

"It is concerning a basic request from a customer could not be followed leaving this 86-year-old woman without electricity for more than 10 hours on a cold April day.

"She also has a visual impairment and was unable to heat her home during a cold snap," she said.

Ms Symons says the decision is particularly timely.

"Last month we launched our new 'Getting to fair' strategy aimed at protecting customers experiencing vulnerability.

"This case illustrates the need for retailers to be diligent in ensuring their processes don't leave customers in the dark," she said.

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

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