

Specification for customer billing practice

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Committees responsible for this British Standard

The preparation of this British Standard was entrusted to Technical Committee UAW/1, Utility administration, upon which the following bodies were represented:

- Age Concern England
- APACS
- BSI Consumer Policy Committee
- Citizens Advice Service
- Design Business Association
- Energywatch
- Energy Institute
- Energy Systems Trade Associations
- Help the Aged
- NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency
- OFCOM
- OFGEM
- OFWAT
- Parliamentary Renewable and Sustainable Energy Group
- Plain Language Commission
- Royal National Institution for the Blind
- Water UK
- Which?
- Co-opted members

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Contents

	Page
Committees responsible	Inside front cover
Foreword	ii
Introduction	1
1 Scope	1
2 Terms and definitions	1
3 Billing processes	2
4 The billing document	5
Annex A (informative) Recommendations for bill presentation	7
Annex B (normative) Supplementary requirements for the billing of corporate customers	12
Bibliography	13
Figure A.1 — Principal page of an estimated bill or statement	8
Figure A.2 — Principal page of a direct debit statement	9
Figure A.3 — Principal page of a multi-service annual statement for a direct debit customer	10
Figure A.4 — Supplementary page of a multi-service bill	11

Foreword

Publishing information

This British Standard has been prepared by Technical Committee UAW/1, Utility administration.

Supersession

BS 8463:2005+A1:2008 supersedes BS 8463:2005, which is withdrawn.

Information about this document

The start and finish of text introduced or altered by Amendment No. 1 is indicated in the text by tags **A1** **A1**.

Use of this document

Users' attention is drawn to the existence of legislation or regulatory requirements that may over-ride some provisions of this British Standard. Up-to-date advice should be sought from appropriate regulatory authorities.

This publication does not purport to include all the necessary provisions of a contract. Users are responsible for its correct application.

Compliance with a British Standard cannot confer immunity from legal obligations.

Summary of pages

This document comprises a front cover, an inside front cover, pages i and ii, pages 1 to 13 and a back cover.

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Introduction

The purpose of this British Standard is to provide a tool for suppliers of utility services (i.e. broadly, but not exclusively, gas, electricity, water, telephone and cable services for which periodic billing is made) to enable them to ensure that their customers can be provided with clearly comprehensible, accurate, timely and complete bills and billing related information.

It is intended that the standard should:

- set minimum standards of billing services for customers;
- provide opportunities for innovation in billing whilst allowing for differentiation in supplier/brand;
- offer a means of giving consumers a clearer understanding and greater certainty of the billing process to engender consumer confidence in utility services;
- provide a fairer basis between the parties for their ongoing relationship;
- serve as a means of minimizing complaints by addressing issues that have been the source of frequent complaints about periodic billing;
- promote informed customer choice;
- offer a means towards meeting corporate social responsibility obligations.

1 Scope

This British Standard specifies the minimum generic requirements for suppliers of services for which periodic billing is made. The requirements pertain to both the billing process and to the billing documents.

It can be applied to services that are unmetered, metered at the point of delivery or metered remotely (e.g. on the supplier's own premises).

Design guidelines for billing documents are given in Annex A.

Supplementary requirements pertaining to the billing of corporate customers are specified in Annex B.

2 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this British Standard, the following definitions apply.

2.1

bill

documentation issued by a supplier to a customer notifying charges due to be paid

2.2

calibration (in respect of prepayment meters)

relationship between energy consumed and payment made or debited

NOTE This may include provision for debt recovery.

2.3

corporate customer

customer supplied other than under a domestic contract or tariff

2.4

customer

party legally responsible for bill payment

2.5

meter point administration number

in respect of electricity supply, the unique reference number(s) registered to the site supplied

NOTE It is frequently referred to as a "Supply Number" or "S" number, and does not relate to any particular meter installed at a property.

2.6

meter point reference number

in respect of gas supply, the unique reference number(s) registered to the site supplied

NOTE It is frequently abbreviated to "MPR", "MPRN" or "M", and does not relate to any particular meter installed at a property.

2.7

statement

expression of information retained by a supplier recording items of debit and credit between itself and a customer

2.8

supplier

party undertaking to supply a service or services for which periodic billing is made

2.9

supply point identification number

generic term for a unique identifier of a specific location to which a service is supplied

NOTE It includes meter point administration numbers, meter point reference numbers and telephone numbers.

3 Billing processes

3.1 Meter readings

Suppliers shall establish, and make publicly available, processes in their business to obtain an actual reading or customer's own reading on which to base each periodic bill.

Suppliers shall devise and implement a policy to:

- engage proactively to encourage and facilitate customers providing a reading; and,
- provide “out-of-hours” meter reading services where requested by a customer.

These processes shall have clear audit trails and shall be internally audited on a regular basis.

3.2 Estimated bills

Suppliers shall establish, and make publicly available, a system designed to ensure that estimated bills relate to foreseeable actual consumption.

Customers shall be encouraged to check the estimated bill against current reading(s) and to provide their own readings if they believe the estimate to be inaccurate.

Suppliers shall ensure that, where a customer's own reading is provided, a replacement bill reflecting this reading is sent out within 10 working days.

3.3 Multi-service providers

A1 In the case where a supplier provides more than one service to a customer, the customer shall be offered, where feasible, the choice of whether to have a separate or composite bill. Where it is not feasible for a supplier to offer this choice to the customer, the supplier shall be able to provide a sound justification for this. **A1**

3.4 Annual statement

Suppliers shall provide customers with an annual statement of actual usage, charges, payments and the final balance. The statement shall indicate any debt payments made.

NOTE The statement should draw attention to any of the supplier's alternative tariffs that might be more appropriate.