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## **ALMOST 3 IN 10 HOUSEHOLDS BILLED WRONGLY BY ENERGY COMPANIES**

*Almost three in ten households (27%) have been billed incorrectly by their energy company within the last two years<sup>[1]</sup>. But despite this, for the first time in 5 years, suppliers have narrowly avoided being voted the worst for getting bills wrong – this year that accolade goes to the Inland Revenue instead<sup>[2]</sup>:*

- **27% of households have been billed incorrectly by their energy company within the last two years – more than one in ten (14%) have had this happen more than once<sup>[1]</sup>**
- **40% of households (10.4 million) have unexpectedly owed money to their energy supplier following a discrepancy between an estimated bill and ‘real’ bill<sup>[3]</sup>**
- **Average amount owed following a billing discrepancy is now £147 - £5 higher than in 2009 but £6 lower than last year<sup>[4]</sup>**
- **Billing inaccuracies take just over 2 months on average to resolve – 40% are sorted out within a week though, a 4% improvement on last year<sup>[5]</sup>**
- **Self-reliant: almost three quarters of households (72%) have provided their energy supplier with a meter reading in the last six months – a 1% increase on 2010<sup>[6]</sup>**
- **Energy suppliers have consistently been the worst billers since 2007, but this year they are pipped to the post as consumers vote the Inland Revenue as the most inaccurate instead<sup>[2]</sup>.**

Consumers have named energy suppliers as one of the worst culprits for getting bills wrong, according to new research from [uSwitch.com](http://uSwitch.com), the independent price comparison and switching service. The energy industry was voted worst for inaccuracy ahead of banks, council departments, credit card companies and other utility companies. But for the first time in five years energy providers have been knocked off the top spot, with consumers naming the Inland Revenue as the worst culprit for getting bills wrong<sup>[2]</sup>.

Almost three in ten households (27%) have been billed incorrectly by their energy company within the last two years – more than one in ten (14%) have had this happen more than once<sup>[1]</sup>. On average these inaccuracies took just over two months to resolve, although 40% are sorted out within a week, a 4% improvement on last year<sup>[5]</sup>.

As well as taking time and effort to sort out, inaccurate bills can leave a hole in people's pockets. Over 10 million households (40%) have unexpectedly ended up owing money to their energy supplier following a discrepancy between an estimated bill and a 'real' bill<sup>[3]</sup>. The average amount owed comes in at £147 – a £5 increase on 2009's figure but £6 lower than last year when people ended up owing £153 on average as a result of inaccurate billing<sup>[4]</sup>. However, 14% of households have unexpectedly ended up owing between £200 - £400 due to a billing discrepancy, while 8% have ended up owing over £400<sup>[4]</sup>.

As a result, the number of households taking matters into their own hands by providing their own meter readings to their supplier continues to grow. Almost three quarters of households (72%) have provided their energy supplier with a meter reading in the last six months – a 1% increase since last year and 8% more than in 2009<sup>[6]</sup>. This is welcome news as providing real meter readings breaks the reliance on estimated and sometimes inaccurate readings<sup>[6]</sup>.

**Ann Robinson, Director of Consumer Policy at [uSwitch.com](http://uSwitch.com), says:** "Inaccurate bills are no laughing matter for consumers who can end up out of pocket and wasting time and effort trying to resolve billing blunders. The fact is that households are at the blunt end of hugely varying standards in billing accuracy, with some industries, companies and organisations performing noticeably better than others and some consistently coming in at the bottom of the class.

"Although energy suppliers are still trailing behind, coming second only to the Inland Revenue for inaccuracy, there are some positive signs here. Less households are being billed inaccurately, less money is being owed as a result and less time is being taken to resolve mistakes. This is extremely welcome, but there is certainly no room for complacency.

"The fact that a growing number of households are providing suppliers with meter readings may have also played a part in improving the accuracy of our energy bills. Consumers should aim to provide a reading once a quarter - failure to do so can result in receiving an estimated bill, which is where many of the issues relating to accuracy lie. It is a simple step to take, but it really is in all of our interests to make sure that suppliers are using up-to-date information on our bills."

**Inaccuracy: how providers compare<sup>[2]</sup>:**

Ranking*	Most inaccurate (2011)	Most inaccurate (2010)	Most inaccurate (2009)	Most inaccurate (2008)	Most inaccurate (2007)
1	Inland Revenue	Energy suppliers (gas and/or electricity)	Energy suppliers (gas and/or electricity)	Energy suppliers (gas and/or electricity)	Energy suppliers (gas and/or electricity)
2	Energy (gas and/or electricity) suppliers	Inland Revenue	Inland Revenue	Inland Revenue	Inland Revenue
3	Communication providers (i.e. broadband, home telephone, digital TV)	Communication providers (broadband, home phone, digital TV)	Communication providers (broadband, home phone, digital TV)	Council Tax departments	Council Tax departments
4	Council tax departments	Water companies	Council Tax departments	Water companies	Communication providers (broadband, home phone, digital TV)
5	5= Water companies	Council Tax departments	Water companies	Communication providers (broadband, home phone, digital TV)	Water companies
6	5 = Mobile phone companies	Mobile phone companies	Mobile phone companies	Mobile phone companies	Mobile phone companies
7	Credit card/ store card providers	Credit card/store card providers	Credit card/store card providers	Banks/Building Societies (current account statements)	Banks/Building Societies (current account statements)
8	Banks/ Building Societies (i.e. current account statements)	Banks/building societies (current account statements)	Banks/building societies (current account statements)	Credit card/store card providers	Credit card/store card providers
9	Mortgage companies	Mortgage companies	Mortgage companies	Mortgage companies	Mortgage companies
10	DVLA (i.e. car tax)	DVLA (road tax)	DVLA (road tax)	DVLA (road tax)	DVLA (road tax)

**Source: uSwitch.com**

Based on the total number of people who rated their bills as inaccurate or very accurate.

**For more information visit [www.uSwitch.com](http://www.uSwitch.com) or call 0800 093 06 07**

**-Ends-**

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**Notes to editors:**

Research referred to in the notes below was conducted online by YouGov Plc on behalf of uSwitch.com. Fieldwork took place from 21 – 24 January 2011 among 2,022 people with decision making involvement with energy suppliers. Data is weighted.

1. In response to: 'Thinking about your energy bill(s), has your energy supplier(s) billed you inaccurately within the last two years?' 14% said 'yes, on more than one occasion' while 13% said 'yes, once'. Added together this makes 27% that have had an inaccurate bill.
2. See table in the release above - rankings based on the total number of people who rated their bills as inaccurate or very inaccurate. 2010 rankings based on research conducted by YouGov on behalf of uSwitch.com 18 – 22 February, 2010, among 2,146 people with decision making involvement with energy suppliers. Data is weighted. 2009 research conducted by YouGov online between 28th January – 2nd February, 2009, with total of 1,975 decision making involvement with energy suppliers. 2008 rankings based on online research conducted by YouGov on behalf of uSwitch.com 20<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> March 2008 among 1,862 adults in Britain with decision making involvement with energy suppliers. 2007 rankings based on online research conducted by YouGov on behalf of uSwitch.com 28 - 30 August 2007 among 2,177 GB adults.
3. 'In response to: 'Have you ever unexpectedly owed money to your energy supplier(s) after they read your meter (i.e. because the actual reading was much higher than the estimates which meant you were required to pay the difference)? 40% said 'yes on more than one occasion' or 'yes, once'. 40% of 26 million households is 10.4 million.
4. Asked of those who answered 'yes' to the point above, 'Approximately how much in total did you owe?', the average was £147, as opposed to £142 in 2009 and £153 in 2010.
5. In response to: 'How long did it take for the inaccuracy to be resolved to your satisfaction?' 15% said 'a day', 25% answered 'within a week', adding up to 40% within a week.
6. In response to: 'When did you last read your own meter and give a reading to your energy supplier?' 34% said within the last month, 27% said 2 to 3 months ago and 11% said 4 to 6 months ago. These add up to 72% within the last 6 months. In 2010 71% had read their own meter in the last 6 months and in 2009 64% had read their own meter in the last 6 months.

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