

20 August 2021

Dear electricity retailer,

Consumer care under COVID-19 lockdowns

The COVID-19 virus and the country's response – in particular, the stringent requirements under Alert Levels 3 and 4 – may result in additional financial or health pressures for many New Zealand households.

We appreciate the immediate actions you have already taken to support your customers since the Alert Level 4 lockdown came into effect this week. As they did in 2020, your consumer focus and actions will help New Zealanders get through this difficult time.

Consumer care guidelines¹ for domestic consumers

The Authority's consumer care guidelines (guidelines) took effect on 1 July 2021. The guidelines focus on electricity retailers providing a consistent and supportive standard of service.

Part 1 of the guidelines recognises "*Electricity is important to the health, wellbeing and social participation of people and whānau in communities*". Under this principle, electricity retailers should:

- work proactively to minimise harm caused by difficulty accessing electricity (including by disconnection)
- keep customers connected, avoiding disconnection for an unpaid electricity invoice, and only use disconnection as a last-resort measure.

The guidelines recommend that disconnections for non-payment, of both post- and pre-pay customers, should not occur at a time that may endanger the wellbeing of the customer or any consumer at the premises (paragraphs 66 and 73). The Authority considers pandemic-related lockdowns (including under COVID-19 Alert Levels 3 and 4 as currently defined) fit this criterion.

We acknowledge any rapid shift to home-based working presents challenges to business continuity. Thank you for your organisation's continued efforts to serve your customers and consumers, and respond to the ongoing effects of the pandemic.

Yours sincerely



James Stevenson-Wallace
Chief Executive

¹ To read the consumer care guidelines and access associated resources, visit <https://www.ea.govt.nz/consumer-care>