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## Topic 5 – Utilities

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So this is your first day in your new home,  
and... oh, no lights!

...and the phone doesn't work!

In Australia, most properties have existing  
wires and pipes outlets connection to utilities.  
This includes:

- gas
- electricity
- phone line
- and water.

Some of them may not work until you have  
set up an account.

Before you move in to a rental property you  
will need to contact suppliers and arrange for  
the utilities to be reconnected under your  
name.

For example, you should arrange for  
electricity and gas to be switched on or for  
your telephone account to be set up by the  
supplier a day before moving in.

You can ask the agent for the supplier's name  
and contact number.

### **Who pays for the utilities?**

Usually the tenant pays for utilities if the  
property is separately metered. Most utilities  
are not included in the rent.

The tenancy agreement you sign with the  
agent or landlord states who pays for each  
utility.

Usually there is a fee for reconnecting or  
switching on utilities and the supplier may ask  
you to sign a contract.

Do not sign a new contract with another utility  
supplier before your current contract has  
ended.

They may charge you for ending your contract  
early.

### **What about gas and electricity?**

Some properties have gas stoves and ovens  
for cooking and gas for heating. Others use  
electricity.

Tenants need to pay for the gas and  
electricity supply if the property has a  
separate meter.

If not, you cannot be charged for the supply.

Contact the Energy & Water Ombudsman  
NSW (EWON) if you have problems with your  
gas and electricity bills or a dispute with the  
utilities provider.

### **What about telephone?**

Most properties have existing telephone  
outlets. Some properties may also have an  
internet outlet for tenants to use.

Tenants are responsible for all charges  
relating to the supply and use of telephone  
and internet. This includes equipment, rental  
charges and for switching on the supply under  
your name.

### **What about TV?**

Most properties have existing TV antennas  
but tenants need to provide their own TV.

If you decide to add a new service, like pay  
TV, make sure you get permission from the  
agent or landlord before installing it.

### **How about water?**

Water is different to other utilities, it is always  
connected. If the taps do not work, turn on the  
water from the meter connection.

You only pay for water usage if the property has a separate water meter. Usually houses have separate water meters.

But units are different. Most unit blocks have shared meters. The landlord pays for the water when there are no separate meters.

If you have a separate meter, the agent must send you a copy of the water bill showing your water usage.

The agent or landlord must give you a copy of the bill within three months and give you at least 21 days to pay it.

They also must arrange for 'water efficient' connections such as water saving shower heads and fix any leaking taps to save water and money.

If any utility is broken contact your agent or landlord right away to fix it. For example, if a water pipe burst, you need to notify the agent or landlord straight away.

These types of repairs are 'urgent repairs' under the tenancy laws and must be fixed quickly.

If you cannot contact the landlord or agent or if they don't fix the problem in a reasonable time, you can arrange for a qualified tradesperson to fix the problem and pay for it yourself.

You can get your money back from the landlord within 14 days –

- if the job is less than \$1,000
- you did not cause the damage
- you gave the landlord or agent a reasonable opportunity to fix the problem
- you have a receipt and written report of the problem from a qualified tradesperson.

If you can't afford to pay for the repairs yourself, you can apply to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) for an order for the landlord to fix the problem.

Contact the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) if you have problems with your gas and electricity bills.

For more information on tenants rights and responsibilities visit the Fair Trading website on [www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au](http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au) or phone 13 32 20.

If you need language assistance ring 13 14 50.