

# Smart Meters

Smart meters are being installed in all Victorian households and small businesses over the next four years as part of a major technology upgrade to our electricity infrastructure.

Victoria is the first state in Australia to give the go-ahead for the widespread roll-out of smart meters. It represents one of the largest improvements to energy infrastructure in the state's history, covering 2.2 million homes and 300,000 businesses.

The new smart meters – also known as advanced metering infrastructure – will provide two-way communication between your electricity meter and your power company, making more immediate information about your electricity use available to you both.

It's a key step towards future smart electricity grids, which we need to better manage new energy flows as more and more renewable energy is supplied to the grid – whether from rooftop solar panels, or from more powerful wind farms.

People will also benefit from more information about how they use energy, with the meters providing accurate electricity reads every 30 minutes. This will help people work out how they can best reduce their energy use and cut power bills.

It will be easier to connect and disconnect power when moving house, and power companies will be able to locate outages and restore power more quickly. For many, it will also mean the end of estimated bills or staying in for meter readings. Over time, the community will also benefit from lower regulated charges for electricity infrastructure.

Already more than 50 million smart meters are being installed across the world. Trials and smart meter projects are now underway in countries ranging from the USA, Canada, and the UK, to Mexico, Portugal, Slovenia and Turkey. The USA also recently announced a \$1 billion extension to its smart meter program.

Installation of smart meters in Victorian homes and businesses started in September 2009 and will finish by the end of 2013.

Electricity distribution businesses – which own the poles and wires that deliver electricity to homes and businesses – are responsible for installing the new smart meters. They will notify you in advance about when you will have a smart meter installed.

In the future, smart meters will enable new pricing options with different rates for different times of the day, week or year. A full assessment of how these prices will affect consumers will need to be completed before these rates are introduced.

## What do smart meters do?

A smart meter is a new type of tool to measure and record how much electricity you use at different times of the day and week.

The meter will be able to measure energy use every 30 minutes, and using telecommunication technology, it can provide this information remotely to your power company.

Smart meters will progressively replace the existing meters for homes and small businesses in Victoria over the next four years.

## How can a smart meter help save energy and money?

By better understanding your electricity use, it's easier to change your behaviour to use less – which can save money on power bills.

Smart meters will enable new types of electricity pricing in the future. This includes time-of-use rates, with different prices for electricity based on the time of day or week, making electricity charges higher in peak periods and lower in off-peak periods. Research indicates that by choosing the right new pricing deal you could make substantial savings on your power bills each year.

Over time, the community will also benefit from lower regulated charges for electricity infrastructure.

For more information on smart meters and what they do visit [www.dpi.vic.gov.au/smartmeters](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/smartmeters)



# Frequently Asked Questions

## Why are we upgrading to smart meters?

The Victorian Government is preparing the state for our energy future. Part of this means upgrading our energy infrastructure. Smart meters will help pave the way for smart grids, which will be important to manage energy flows as we increase our renewable energy generation. They will also help keep regulated electricity infrastructure costs down and help people better manage their electricity use and cut power bills.

## When will I get a smart meter?

The smart meter roll-out started in September 2009, and will run to the end of 2013. Smart meters are being installed progressively a few suburbs at a time, by electricity distribution businesses. It is up to each business to decide the areas where they will install smart meters first. About a month before smart meters are being installed in your area, you will receive introductory letters from the Victorian Government and your electricity distribution business. A following letter will then tell you when the meter will be installed in your property – providing a 10-day period within which it will occur.

## How will they get access to the meter box?

Your electricity distribution business requires clear and safe access to the meter box to complete the smart meter installation. If they can access the meter, you do not have to be home when the smart meter is installed. If you need to be home to provide access, you will be able to make arrangements with your distribution business.

## What happens when they install the new smart meter?

Qualified meter installers appointed by your electricity distribution business will come to your property to remove the old meter and replace it with a new smart meter.

Meter installers will have photo ID stating that the person is a contractor representing your electricity distributor. This ID will have a telephone number to call so you can check if the installer is an authorised representative.

Before starting work, the installer will knock on your door to let you know. Your power will need to be switched off for a short time – approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Once installed, you will receive instructions on how to read the new smart meter.

## Do I own the smart meter?

No. Like your existing electricity meter, the smart meter is owned by your electricity distribution business.

## Does everyone get a smart meter?

Yes, all homes and small to medium businesses will receive a new smart meter. Delivering this technology to everyone is the only way we can transition to smarter, more efficient, electricity grids on a statewide basis.

If you would like to receive this information/publication in an accessible format (such as large print or audio) please call the Customer Service Centre on 136 186, TTY 1800 122 969, or email [customer.service@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:customer.service@dpi.vic.gov.au).

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## Who is paying for the smart meters?

In the same way you pay for the current meter and electricity infrastructure (the poles and wires), the costs of the overall smart meter upgrade will be included in your electricity bill over a number of years.

Smart meters are improving the grid, and as with all improvements to the network, the costs are recovered from everyone at the same time. The charges are regulated by the independent Australian Energy Regulator, which is responsible for making sure that they are fair and reasonable.

## Do smart meters help with rooftop solar panels and feed-in tariffs?

Yes, smart meters are designed to be compatible with rooftop solar panels. They will be able to regularly measure the power sent to the electricity grid from solar or other renewable sources of energy that may be eligible for credit through feed-in tariffs. Smart meters are more advanced than the bi-directional or interval meters often used now for feed-in tariffs. They also include additional telecommunications technologies which can provide more immediate information about energy flows directly to both consumers and power companies.

## Will I still be able to access off-peak rates for hot-water, heating or airconditioning once I have a smart meter?

Yes, smart meters will be able to manage appliances set to run at certain times to take advantage of off-peak rates as is the case with current off peak rates.

## What is the difference between electricity distribution businesses and electricity retail companies?

Electricity distribution businesses are responsible for the poles and wires that bring electricity to homes and businesses across the state. Your electricity distributor depends on where you live – you cannot choose your distribution company.

In Victoria, there are five different electricity distributors – SP AusNet, Powercor, CitiPower, Jemena Electricity Network and United Energy Distribution. To find out which distribution company is yours visit [www.dpi.vic.gov.au/smartmeters](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/smartmeters)

Electricity retail companies sell electricity to customers. These are the companies that send you your electricity bill. You can choose your energy retailer and they compete for your business. For more information on choosing your energy retail company visit [www.yourchoice.vic.gov.au](http://www.yourchoice.vic.gov.au)

## Where can I go to get more information?

Visit [www.dpi.vic.gov.au/smartmeters](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/smartmeters) or call the Department of Primary Industries Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

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