

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD

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Network services billing — Requirements

Facturation de services en réseau — Exigences



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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO 14452 was prepared by Project Committee ISO/PC 239, *Network services billing*.

Introduction

The purpose of this International Standard is to provide a market-based and market-sensitive way of dealing with the concerns of customers about the billing practices of utility network service providers. Billing is a major source of complaints to companies and industry ombudsmen. Problems experienced by customers include the following:

- bill shock (i.e. the negative reaction experienced by a customer upon receiving a bill that is higher than expected);
- bills are complicated and difficult to understand;
- pricing is not always clear;
- bills are inaccurate;
- payment methods present difficulties for customers;
- bills are overloaded with information, which adds to the confusion;
- information about offers and guidance on switching supplier is unclear.

These problems arise because of:

- poor pre-billing processes, including customer service, tariff and data management, meter reading and provision of information to customers on billing-related matters;
- unsatisfactory billing procedures and practices, leading to delayed or inaccurate bills;
- poorly presented bills and statements, which are unclear for customers;
- ineffective post-billing processes to deal with:
 - disputes and enquiries;
 - payment and debt collection;
 - consumers in vulnerable circumstances;
 - final bills for customers changing supplier;
- inaccurate customer expectations, based on confusing advertising or promotional material and complicated tariffs.

Clearer bills will assist customers to verify the accuracy of billed charges and will increase customers' confidence in their bills and their supplier's performance. Where alternative suppliers are available to the customer, this will also help customers to choose the supplier that best meets their needs. Suppliers are likely to benefit from fewer complaints, leading to lower operating costs, easier recovery of debts and higher levels of customer satisfaction, which will help them retain market share. Establishing a common International Standard will also assist companies that own utilities in more than one territory to reduce their costs, by adopting common billing processes and systems in different countries.

This International Standard provides a tool for suppliers of utility services to ensure that their processes enable customers to be provided with clearly comprehensible, accurate, timely and complete bills, and to have access to sufficient billing-related information to enable them to verify the accuracy of billed charges. It is intended that this International Standard:

- a) defines the minimum requirements for the billing and payment collection processes;
- b) prevents or reduces complaints, by addressing issues that have been the source of frequent complaints;
- c) ensures that suppliers deal with customers on billing matters in an appropriate and consistent manner;
- d) provides a fairer basis for an ongoing relationship between utility companies and customers;
- e) provides benchmarks for the level of customer expectations;

- f) allows for the implementation of smart metering technology and the provision of improved information to customers;
- g) offers scope for innovation in billing, which will enable suppliers to differentiate their services to customers in a competitive market.

This International Standard is aimed at utility bills which include an element of metered or measured consumption. Many of the key principles in this International Standard will, however, apply to all forms of billing, and suppliers are therefore encouraged to adopt the requirements in this International Standard even if usage is not metered or otherwise measured.

While the provisions of this International Standard are considered to be generally applicable globally, it is recognized that many regional or national factors might require adaptations or exceptions in order to meet prevailing cultural, social, economic, regulatory and even climatic conditions.

Network services billing — Requirements

1 Scope

This International Standard specifies the minimum requirements for billing of all consumption-based utility network services to domestic customers. It covers the processes required to produce the bill and to deal with issues that arise after the bill has been sent, as well as the content of the billing document or statement. This International Standard is applicable to utility network services that are unmetered, metered at the point of delivery or metered remotely (e.g. on the supplier's own premises), and it covers any unmetered or unmeasured charges appearing on the same bill as metered or measured charges, as well as flat rate charges.

NOTE 1 Utility network services include electricity supply, water, sanitation, gas supply, district heating and communications.

NOTE 2 The requirements given in this International Standard are also applicable to other consumers who are legally entitled to use the service provided by the supplier, except where in order to comply with privacy or data protection requirements, it is necessary for the supplier to obtain the authority of the registered customer before dealing with another consumer on billing matters.

This International Standard does not cover pricing, except for a requirement to provide information to customers. It is only applicable to billing for consumption-based utility network services and it applies to all bills or statements for utility network services where there is an ongoing account relationship between the customer and the supplier, regardless of the payment method used.

NOTE 3 This includes bills for metered consumption, bills where a formula is used to estimate consumption (e.g. water bills based on the number of persons per household or the size of the house), or where a flat rate fee is charged regardless of consumption (e.g. telephony or internet bills where the tariff allows unlimited usage). It also applies to prepayment customers, where a bill or account from the supplier is necessary to enable the customer to reconcile the amount paid in advance with the cost of consumption, or where the customer expects to receive a bill based on point of sale or other advertising (e.g. mobile telephony and energy metering) where codes, keys, electronic dongles or electronic cards are used to load and reload the service and to indicate what was purchased.

NOTE 4 Services that are not billed [e.g. mobile telephony paid for by pre-purchased SIM (Subscriber Identity Module) cards that are unmetered] and services that are funded directly by the taxpayer without bills being issued are not covered by this International Standard.

NOTE 5 Many of the key principles in this International Standard also apply to all forms of billing, and suppliers are therefore encouraged to adopt the relevant requirements in this International Standard for billing of other services.

2 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

2.1

account

supplier's record of a customer's bill and associated charges, and of billing arrangements with the customer for the service(s) required, including customer information to assist with customer enquiries and credit assessment and management

2.2

bill

invoice issued by a supplier to a customer in paper or electronic form, notifying charges due to be paid by the customer for products and services purchased, requested, acquired or used by the customer

2.3 billing

function whereby charges generated by a network accounting function are transformed into bills

EXAMPLE The following processes are included within the billing function:

- calculating, applying and setting out the charges incurred by a customer during the billing period;
- calculating, applying and setting out any debts or credits outstanding or discounts due, and calculating the net amount to be paid by the customer or adjusted against prepayments made by the customer;
- issuing and delivering the bill;
- the incremental debiting of a prepaid account based on the service utilized;
- handling billing enquiries from the customer;
- receiving and acknowledging receipt of payments made by the customer.

2.4 billing accuracy

correctness of charges included in a bill to a customer, in terms of consistency with what the customer has requested, subscribed, purchased, acquired or utilized, and in compliance with the supplier's contracted or published tariffs and any discounts due

NOTE For a prepaid account, billing accuracy includes the incremental debiting of the account for the service used, based on the advertised rate.

2.5 billing address

address given by the customer to which the bill is provided

NOTE The address is either a postal address or an electronic address.

2.6 billed charge

amount billed by a supplier to a customer

2.7 billing complaint

expression of dissatisfaction or grievance by a customer, to which the customer expects a response from the supplier, about any aspect of the customer's bill or the supplier's billing service

NOTE This includes complaints made verbally, by telephone or face to face, and complaints made in writing, by hard copy or electronically.

2.8 billing dispute

pursued, unresolved customer billing complaint

2.9 billing enquiry

request to a supplier by a customer for information about charges or other content on the supplier's bill, or about other aspects of the supplier's billing service, relevant to that customer

2.10 billing option

billing-related feature, usually at no charge, which a customer can choose

EXAMPLE Billing frequency.

2.11 billing period

period of time, typically a month or quarter, or the end dates to which charges are billed

2.12**billing product**

enhanced billing-related offering, usually subject to a fee, to a customer or group of customers

2.13**billing timeliness**

meeting of stipulated time-related performance standards associated with billing activities

2.14**calibration**

expected and designed relationship in respect of prepayment meters, between energy or communication units consumed and payment made or debited

NOTE This includes any provision for debt recovery.

2.15**charge**

tariff or fee levied by a supplier for the provision of a product, service or transaction, or for a third party product or service

2.16**combined heat and power**

system that uses waste heat from electricity production, in order to provide hot water and space heating for neighbouring buildings

2.17**communications**

fixed line and wireless telephony, including mobile and cell phones, satellite and cable television, and data services such as internet or multi-media entertainment

2.18**consumer**

individual member of the general public, purchasing or using goods, property or services, for private purposes

NOTE For network billing, this will be a person other than the customer registered at that address who is entitled to use the service provided by the supplier to the bill payer.

2.19**customer**

person or entity legally responsible for payment, or a consumer legally entitled to use the service provided by the supplier to the bill payer

NOTE To comply with privacy or data protection requirements, the authority of the bill payer or registered customer is required before dealing with another consumer on billing matters.

2.20**customer vulnerability****customer in vulnerable circumstances**

temporary or permanent condition in which a customer is at greater than average risk of being put at a disadvantage in accessing the service, dealing with the supplier, or seeking redress, and/or can have particular problems due to unusually high need for the service, lack of suitable alternative services or severe financial difficulties

NOTE This term is used rather than the term “vulnerable customers”, because the latter term implies that vulnerability is a constant state and can be applied to set groups of people with certain characteristics, affecting all of their transactions and interactions. In reality, vulnerability can affect any customer and cannot be applied to fixed, identifiable groups of customers with certain characteristics or personal circumstances.

2.21
direct debit
standing order

automatic payment of a fixed or variable amount from the customer's nominated financial institution account, as agreed with the customer

NOTE This also includes regular fixed payments made by a standing order instruction given by customers to their bank.

2.22
discount

pricing offer resulting in a variation, in the customer's favour, from a supplier's tariff or fee

NOTE These variations result from individual supplier/customer agreements, rebates as compensation for service interruptions or other incidents, or from wider market offerings.

2.23
district heating

heating systems that distribute steam or hot water through pipes to a number of buildings across a district

NOTE Heat is provided from a variety of sources, including geothermal, combined heat and power plants, waste heat from industry, or purpose-built heating plants.

2.24
domestic customer

end user or customer living in a domestic household supplied under a domestic contract or tariff, purchasing product for the customer's private, personal or household use, and excluding any commercial activities

NOTE This is the person normally permitted to discuss service and billing matters with the service provider.

2.25
electricity

supply of mains electricity to customers from the grid, including electricity generated or exported by the customer and fed back into the electricity grid

2.26
electronic bill

bill utilizing an electronic medium

2.27
essential service

supply of electricity, water, sanitation, gas and district heating

2.28
gas supply

supply of mains gas to customers through the transmission and distribution network

2.29
meter point administration/reference number

unique reference number often used in gas and electricity allocated to the site supplied and registered, which does not relate to any particular meter installed at a property

2.30
payment method

method used by the customer to pay for the service

EXAMPLES Prepaid; payment in arrears; direct debit.

2.31
prepayment

purchase of a code, key, dongle or dongle content required prior to service usage being made available

NOTE This is commonly known as "pay-as-you-go".

2.32**product**

good or service provided by the supplier

2.33**sanitation**

provision of water and/or removal of waste water to or from sanitary appliances

2.34**statement**

summary of information provided by a supplier recording items of debit and credit between itself and a customer

2.35**supplier**

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

2.36**supply point identification number**

unique identifier of a specific location to which a service is supplied

2.37**tariff**

fixed or variable charge permitting calculation of the price to be levied by a supplier for the provision of a product or service during the period used

2.38**third party**

relevant organisation or individual other than the supplier or customer

2.39**third party charges**

charges billed by a supplier, on behalf of another commercial entity, for goods and services provided by that other commercial entity

2.40**water**

water used for water supply

2.41**working days**

days of the usual working week, excluding official public holidays

3 Billing process**3.1 Pre-billing process****3.1.1 Data standards**

3.1.1.1 Processes shall be established covering the collection, validation, update, retention, privacy and protection of all personal data that are obtained and used by the supplier or its agent for billing purposes, including calculation of consumption, to ensure that:

- a) the privacy and integrity of data held are maintained;
- b) the information shown on bills is correct.

3.1.1.2 Where billing data are provided to the supplier by a third party (e.g. another supplier or a network operator), processes shall be established to ensure their validity and accuracy. If the data are subsequently retained by the supplier, then processes should also cover privacy and protection.

3.1.1.3 Records of a customer's bill and how the bill was arrived at, shall be retained for at least two years. Those two-year billing records of former customers shall also be retained for at least one year after they have left the supplier.

NOTE Any minimum period of time required by law is also relevant.

3.1.1.4 Changes to customer details shall be recorded in the supplier's database within 10 working days of the receipt of changes from the customer.

NOTE Any minimum period of time required by law is also relevant.

3.1.1.5 Target performance levels shall be established for each element of the data standards and performance against the targets shall be monitored and reported to senior management on a regular basis, with action taken to address any failures. Where required, this information shall also be reported to the relevant sectoral regulator.

3.1.2 Meter readings

3.1.2.1 Unless remote or automatic meter reading is used, where it is necessary to obtain a meter reading in order to calculate an accurate bill:

- a) Processes shall be established, and made publicly available, to obtain an actual meter reading or a customer's own reading on which to base each periodic bill;
- b) performance targets shall be established and published in respect of the accuracy and frequency of meter readings collected by the supplier or its agent, and the extent to which the targets have been achieved;
- c) information on the frequency of meter reading should be published where this activity is the responsibility of an independent third party (e.g. a network operator);
- d) a policy shall be devised and implemented to engage proactively to encourage and facilitate customers providing a reading, and to provide "out-of-hours" meter reading services where requested by a customer.

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

3.1.2.3 Where the meter stops working and it is necessary to estimate the consumption, the policy and procedure for calculating the estimated consumption should be disclosed and the estimate should be agreed with the customer. If agreement cannot be reached, the billing disputes process should be used to resolve the issue.

3.1.2.4 If remote or automatic reading is used, but is unable to provide a reading which can be used for billing, the requirements in 3.1.2.1 a) and 3.2.2.1 should be followed to obtain manual meter readings, using customer meter readings and estimated meter readings.

3.1.3 Other consumer data

For charges relating to non-metered consumption, where other data are used to calculate usage, the data used as the basis for such charges shall be open for review.

EXAMPLE 1 The number of persons per household.

EXAMPLE 2 The size or value of the house or other relevant information used to calculate non-metered consumption.

EXAMPLE 3 For communications billing, the number of calls or minutes, the number of calls received and other communication unit data.

3.1.4 Definitions of products/services

For each product/service provided, customers shall be provided at the outset with clear details of the following:

- a) the product or service that the customer should expect to receive, including any limitations on continuity of supply;
- b) terms and conditions;
- c) prices and discounts relating to their product/service and bill, including any additional charges, time limit for discounts and the formulae for calculation of non-metered charges (e.g. standing charges, per capita charges, other fixed charges of a non-volumetric nature);
- d) billing arrangements and options;
- e) payment arrangements and options;
- f) any additional charges associated with specific billing or payment options;
- g) any limitations relating to the product, such as any interruption of supply, or any responsibilities of the customer to notify the supplier of changes which may affect the provision of the product;
- h) any rebates, compensation and/or concessions related to service failures;
- i) communication channels and contact information, including for emergencies;
- j) dispute resolution arrangements;
- k) particular services or assistance available for customers with specific needs.

3.1.5 Provision of additional information requested by customers

In response to a request from a customer, information on billing and prices shall be provided without charge, including further information on individual items appearing on the bill in the current or two previous billing periods. A charge shall not be levied for the provision of information required to resolve a *bona fide* billing dispute in relation to the current or previous billing periods. Where a charge is levied, the fee shall be limited to the reasonable cost of providing that information and the customer shall be informed of the fee in advance.

3.1.6 Changes of a significant nature

Changes of a significant nature shall be notified to individual customers prior to implementation, and confirmed in the next bill after the change.

NOTE A significant change is any change which impacts on previously notified prices, rebates, concessions, payment terms or the level of service provided

3.2 Billing principles

3.2.1 Timeliness

3.2.1.1 Bills shall cover an agreed regular period and shall normally be sent within 15 working days of the end of that period, unless one of the following applies:

- a) there is a separate agreement with the customer;
- b) additional information is included, such as usage analysis or other detail that is needed by the customer, which requires extra processing time;
- c) the bill is delayed while charges or consumption are validated, or other quality checks are completed.

3.2.1.2 The payment due date should be at least 10 days after the date on which the bill is issued.

3.2.1.3 All charges, rebates or concessions relating to the current billing period shall be incorporated in the current bill.

3.2.1.4 Charges relating to usage in a period of more than 12 months prior to the bill date, which have not previously been billed, shall not be included in the bill if one of the following applies:

- a) the supplier has received the necessary notifications but failed to set up a record on their billing systems;
- b) the supplier has failed to set up or maintain accurate meter and metering data,
- c) the supplier has failed to use valid readings or other data provided by the customer or data collector;
- d) the supplier has failed to reassess regular payments within the previous 15 months, based on accurate information available to them, or has failed to communicate the need for and use of a customer's own reading at this time;
- e) the supplier has failed to attempt to obtain a valid reading during the previous 15 months;
- f) the supplier has failed to send a bill to the customer or to the billing address during the previous 12 months, unless the express agreement with the individual customer allows for this.

3.2.1.5 Charges relating to a usage in a period of more than 12 months prior to the bill date may be included in the bill where the following can be demonstrated:

- the customer has given permission to do so and the supplier has recorded that permission;
- the customer has used the supply, but has not made any attempt to contact the supplier or arrange payment;
- the customer is wilfully avoiding payment;
- the customer has not co-operated with attempts to obtain meter readings or resolve billing enquiries required to facilitate accurate bill production.

3.2.1.6 Subsequent billing of charges for earlier periods should be subject to dispute resolution with ultimate recourse to independent assessment if agreement is not reached.

3.2.1.7 Customers whose payment method (e.g. direct debit or prepayment) requires statements, or who have requested statements, shall receive them at agreed intervals (but not less than annually), together with guidance on how to check their accuracy and how to notify any discrepancies.

3.2.1.8 Statements should be provided to gas and electricity customers with prepayment meters and to prepaid mobile telephone customers, who make payments in advance which are credited to their account, to enable them to reconcile payments made with charges for usage. Statements are not required where the customer does not have an account relationship with the supplier (e.g. pay-as-you-go SIM cards for mobile telephones that are not metered) or where the supply is provided in full at the time that the payment is made (e.g. bottled gas or oil).

3.2.1.9 Where the charge to be billed does not vary from period to period and the customer elects to pay by direct debit, or in the case of prepaid mobile telephone customers, the customer may be informed that a paper bill will not be sent for each period, but that a bill will be provided upon request.

3.2.1.10 Incremental debits from a prepaid account normally occur in real time and it shall be made clear to customers if this is not the case.

3.2.2 Accuracy and reconciliation

3.2.2.1 Where it is not possible for the bill to be calculated based on an actual meter reading and/or other relevant data, a system shall be established, and a methodology made publicly available, designed to ensure that estimated bills relate to foreseeable actual usage.

3.2.2.2 Estimated meter readings shall be clearly indicated on a bill by the word “estimated” or by a symbol which can clearly be interpreted by the customer to mean an estimated reading (e.g. “E” in bold typeface), displayed next to the meter reading. Successive estimated bills shall highlight the importance of customers checking the estimate and providing their own reading.

3.2.2.3 Customers receiving estimated bills should be encouraged to provide their own reading to prevent build up of debt or overpayments.

3.2.2.4 Processes shall be established to ensure that, where a customer’s own reading is provided, a replacement bill reflecting this reading is sent out within 10 working days if a replacement bill is requested by the customer, or if the new reading makes a material difference to the amount billed. Customer-supplied meter readings shall be indicated on the bill by the word “customer” or by a symbol which can clearly be interpreted by the customer to mean the customer’s reading (e.g. “C” in bold typeface), displayed next to the meter reading.

3.2.2.5 Replacement bills may be issued whenever an amended reading is received.

3.2.2.6 Clear policies shall be established, and made publicly available, as to what will happen if there is an overpayment or underpayment, including the following:

- a) publishing a contact number for access to staff who have the capacity, the skill and the authority to resolve the issue;
- b) the procedures and conditions governing refund or credit, where overcharging has occurred, incorporating a statement as to the period by which any such refund or credit will be effected:
 - in the case of a refund, this period shall be not more than 10 working days from the date of agreement that a refund will be made;
 - in the case of a credit, it shall appear on the next bill or shall be credited to prepaid accounts with notice given to the customer;
- c) the opportunity to pay the amount owing over a period at least equal to that in which any undercharging took place, unless the undercharge has arisen because the customer was at fault for not allowing access to read the meter: where a customer’s circumstances affecting the ability to pay are made known to the supplier, these shall be taken into account when arranging the repayment period.

3.2.2.7 Where the supplier or its agent is responsible for metering services, a documented policy shall be established to verify the continued validity of the calibration of gas and electricity prepayment meters.

3.2.2.8 Where metering services are the responsibility of an independent third party (e.g. a network operator), procedures shall be established to identify where recalibration is required and to ensure that the third party responds appropriately to requests for recalibration.

NOTE Calibration is sometimes referred to as the “charging rate”. It is a different process from that of ensuring the accuracy and reliability of a meter.

3.2.3 Bill validation process

3.2.3.1 Processes shall be established to allow the supplier to verify that bills are accurate, including any information received from an agent.

3.2.3.2 Where a bill is significantly higher than previous bills for that customer, but the supplier is satisfied that the bill is correct, a proactive attempt to contact the customer in advance shall be made to explain the problem or a message shall be included with the bill asking the customer to contact the supplier to discuss the bill. In these circumstances, the customer should be offered the opportunity to spread the payment over a longer period. If the customer exceeds the previous bill limit, then the customer should be informed when this is identified.

3.2.3.3 The supplier shall provide information to customers to enable them to verify that their bill is correct. This information shall either be shown on the bill or be readily accessible by the customer and, where appropriate, shall include access to details of itemized charges shown on the bill.

3.2.3.4 Customers shall have ready access to information on prices relevant to their service and/or bill.

3.2.3.5 Calculations shall be simple and unit costs for each usage band shall be explained. Standing charges shall also be explained, showing the dates covered by the bill. Any conversions shall be explained in words and by a numeric formula.

NOTE Conversions include units of volume to units of energy on gas bills; minutes and seconds to chargeable calls on telephone bills, and bytes of data to chargeable units on communications bills

3.3 Billing document

3.3.1 General

3.3.1.1 The bill is the prime means for the supplier to receive payment and may also be the main instrument for customers to have information on their consumption and on the price they pay. Design and layout of the bill is a matter for each supplier, but a policy shall be established for researching customer experience to test the layout of bills for comprehensibility and clarity, and compliance with the following general principles:

- a) bills shall be accurate, transparent and comparable;
- b) bills shall be readily understandable by customers;
- c) plain and simple language should be used and this should be verified through independent testing involving disabled customers with a range of sensitive and cognitive impairments;
- d) the presentation and format of bills shall be such that the customer can easily comprehend the content, with information provided in a simplified and readable manner;
- e) due regard shall be given to the layout, use of colour, contrast, and the size and style of font to ensure that the information shown is clear to all customers;

NOTE Guidance on bill presentation is given in Annex A.

- f) customer education shall be encouraged with the inclusion of information on sustainability, environmental awareness and responsible usage.

3.3.1.2 Information relevant to the current bill, or any item of its content, shall be provided to customers if requested.

3.3.1.3 Technical terms used in the bill shall be explained.

3.3.1.4 Where possible, bills should be printed on both sides of the page and should not be more than two pages unless the level of detail requested by the customer requires additional pages.

3.3.1.5 Where a composite bill is supplied, there shall be a clear breakdown of the billing for each individual service. Where the charge varies depending on time of use or category of service, the bill shall also contain a breakdown of usage by each time period or category of service. Where the bill contains a credit or adjustment for the export or generation of electricity by the customer, it shall include a breakdown of how the credit has been calculated.

3.3.1.6 Fundamental information shall be prominently and clearly set out on the bill. Where practical, it should be shown on the principal page of the billing document. Further information shall be provided on subsequent pages or, where appropriate, in other material provided to the customer (see 3.3.2).

NOTE Where bills are provided in a bilingual format, the amount of information shown on each page will be reduced.

3.3.1.7 The bill shall signpost the customer to additional information on websites or other sources.

3.3.1.8 Bills should reflect national policy on disability and language, and should meet the specific needs of disabled customers and those who have literacy difficulties, e.g. Braille, large print, or audio format bills.

3.3.1.9 Bills shall contain information about payment terms and options, especially for those having difficulties with their payment.

3.3.1.10 Bills shall allow customers to compare competing offers by providing clear information on billing units and prices, which will help customers to identify possible savings and switch supplier where appropriate.

3.3.1.11 Where the information is available, bills should indicate the consumption during the immediate past billing period and the consumption for the same period in the immediate previous year.

3.3.2 Bill content

3.3.2.1 Table 1 shows the fundamental information which shall appear prominently on the bill, as well as the further information which should also be shown in the billing document or, where appropriate, in other material accessible by the customer (e.g. in leaflets sent with the bill or by reference to information held on the supplier’s website).

Table 1 – Bill content

Category	Fundamental information (to appear on first page of bill where practical)	Further information (to appear on subsequent pages of the billing document or in other material accessible by the customer)
Supplier details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Supplier’s name and telephone contact details, including times to call and call rates — Supplier’s website, e-mail and/or postal address — 24 h contact number for service emergencies 	—
Customer details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Customer’s name and billing address — Name of any nominated third party to whom the bill is sent — Customer account reference — Supply address (if different from the billing address) — Category of customer (e.g. domestic, business) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Meter number(s) if the supply is metered at the point of delivery — Meter point administration/reference numbers and supply point identification number (where applicable)
General bill details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Billing period — Bill issue date — Bill reference (if different from the customer account reference) — Status of document (e.g. bill, statement, provisional bill or final bill) — Service to which the bill refers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Dates the meter readings were taken (actual readings only) — Contract period, or start and end dates of contract and the deadline for informing the supplier if the customer wants to switch supplier

Table 1 (continued)

Category	Fundamental information (to appear on first page of bill where practical)	Further information (to appear on subsequent pages of the billing document or in other material accessible by the customer)
Usage details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Summary showing the total cost of each service or commodity to which the bill relates in the same format as the pricing information previously provided, including any payment in advance, applicable credits, discounts, and the net amount payable by the customer — Next monthly bill amount (where bill requires payment in advance for some or all of the service) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Meter reading information for the end of the current period and immediately preceding period (for metered consumption of gas, electricity and water only) — Meter reading type and guidance if bill is not based on actual reading (for metered consumption of gas, electricity and water only) — Description of the charges for which the customer is billed — Full itemized details of all call charges (telephone only) in the same format as the pricing information previously provided, unless otherwise agreed with customer or where full itemization would result in excessive bill size — Details of taxation/levy elements — Network or other third party prices (where charged separately) — Breakdown of composite bills (e.g. local calls, national calls, international calls, messages) — Contact details for third party charges and billing
Payment details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Amount due for payment, including or excluding the amount due from earlier bills not previously paid — Payment due date and any late payment fee — Whether the bill is based upon a supplier estimate or actual reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Statement of terms for payment, including payment address, instructions for e-payments, details of locations for cash payments and other forms of payment accepted

Table 1 (continued)

Category	Fundamental information (to appear on first page of bill where practical)	Further information (to appear on subsequent pages of the billing document or in other material accessible by the customer)
Tariff details and other charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — The name of the tariff(s) according to which the customer is charged for both metered and non-metered consumption and a reference to a clear price breakdown, e.g. the base price of one energy unit per kilowatt-hour, or number of calls, or units of communication for each category — Any change of tariff or contract rate during the billing period, and details of the amounts covered by the bill both prior to and after any price change — All other charges and taxes, including any one-off charges applicable to the bill, e.g. connection charges or termination fees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Method of calculation/information on price, e.g. breakdown of all fixed and variable charges and methodology for determining units of usage — Early exit penalties or surcharges (if applicable)
General messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Other tariff options — How to terminate the contract — Estimated dates for the next bill and/or next statement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Details of code of practice covering payments — Large-print message for those with visual impairments, including information on how to obtain bills in alternative formats — Information on services for people with disabilities or communication difficulties, including sensory impairment or speech impediments — Contact details for third party bodies to enable a complainant to obtain independent, external help, advice or redress when the supplier cannot deal with a complaint to the satisfaction of the complainant — Procedure for notification of change of customer details — Energy mix of the individual customer, if possible, and the total energy mix of the supplier (electricity only), to show how it is generated and how environmentally friendly it is — Advice on energy or water savings and other environmental tips, e.g. by providing a link to a website or the number to call for a leaflet — Explanation of codes and abbreviations on the bill — The switching code (where relevant) needed to switch supplier

3.3.2.2 The customer shall always be informed when there is a change to any of the further information listed in Table 1. If the information is unchanged from the previous bill or notification, it is not necessary to provide the information in full on each bill, providing the customer is advised where the information can be obtained (e.g. by signposting them to the supplier's website or giving a telephone number to call).

3.3.2.3 A comparability box should feature prominently on the bill and contain all the key information that customers need to compare offers, including the following:

- the supplier's name and their contact details (including their helpline and emergency number);

- the duration of the contract and the deadline for informing the supplier if the customer wants to switch to another supplier;
- the tariff name and a reference to a clear price breakdown for the customer's tariff (e.g. the base price plus the price of one energy unit under the tariff selected and all other charges and taxes);
- the switching code (needed to switch suppliers).

3.3.3 Annual statement

3.3.3.1 An easily understandable annual statement should be provided to customers who receive bills from their supplier and who are still with that supplier when the annual statements are prepared.

NOTE The annual statement consolidates the information shown on bills so that customers understand their usage and are helped to make better decisions on consumption, services, tariffs and switching suppliers (where relevant).

3.3.3.2 The information shown on the annual statement should provide a clear indication that this is a reconciliation bill or statement and should include the following:

- a) payments, including any debt payments made, and the final balance;
- b) a summary of actual usage in the last 12 months, both in units of consumption and expenditure, including any rebates or concessions due to service interruptions or other incidents;
- c) projected costs for the next 12 months, assuming no change in usage;
- d) clear information on whether the regular (e.g. monthly) instalments need to be recalculated and, if so, how to change the amount that is paid regularly in instalments;
- e) clear signposting where estimates have been used to calculate consumption;
- f) where available, information to help customers understand their usage and charges in simple, easy-to-read formats (e.g. a bar chart).

EXAMPLE 1 A comparison of usage for the current period with the corresponding period in previous year.

EXAMPLE 2 A comparison with other users (e.g. high, medium or low).

EXAMPLE 3 A summary of historic usage in units of consumption and expenditure over the previous 12 months.

- g) the name of the tariff used by the customer;
- h) clear and transparent pricing information, with details of any discount or premium that applies to the tariff;
- i) information on other tariffs or payment options that may reduce the costs for the customer, with details of potential savings.

3.3.3.3 Where appropriate, the statement should also include the following:

- a) a reminder that the customer can switch services, tariffs and supplier;
- b) a summary of key information required by the customer to switch supplier and to compare tariffs with other suppliers;
- c) signposting to independent advice on switching and/or information on accredited price comparison services;
- d) any contract terms that may affect a customer's ability to switch;
- e) a reminder of energy efficiency help and social assistance programmes available for energy customers;

NOTE Social assistance programmes include information on any social tariffs that offer reduced prices to customers experiencing financial hardship.

- f) information for energy customers regarding alternative tariffs for energy generated from renewable sources and an estimate of emissions from current annual consumption of energy;
- g) information on the full range of payment methods, including e-payments, payment by mobile phone and cash payments;
- h) customer-specific information, including any irregularities or variations in the consumption that need to be brought to the notice of the customer, details of meter replacement during the year and any reported or attempted thefts.

3.3.4 Format and delivery

3.3.4.1 The billing document shall be delivered to the customer in either paper format or, as agreed between the supplier and customer, in an appropriate alternative format (e.g. Braille, audio format, large print, e-billing). This requirement shall apply even where real time displays are in use.

3.3.4.2 Where e-billing is to be employed, it shall utilize generally accepted electronic business formats with software that can be readily accessed by customers, including by mobile phones.

3.4 Post-billing processes

3.4.1 Billing disputes and enquiries

3.4.1.1 Documented processes (e.g. see ISO 10002) shall be established, and made publicly available, to deal with customer billing complaints or enquiries. This should include the target timescales for responding to the customer.

3.4.1.2 A choice of free or low-cost (e.g. standard local tariff) easy-to-access contact channels for use by customers shall be offered and this should normally include a telephone number for billing complaints and enquiries. If an electronic address is used instead of a telephone number, a postal address shall also be provided.

3.4.1.3 Any call charges to be incurred by the customer for enquiry calls to their supplier that are in excess of the standard local call tariff shall be justifiable and explained on the bill and other materials.

3.4.1.4 The bill shall contain clear information on the following:

- a) a telephone number and/or postal address and/or e-mail address for complaints and enquiries;
- b) services for people with communication difficulties;
- c) contact details for third party bodies that can provide independent help and advice or that can resolve outstanding disputes when the supplier cannot deal with a complaint to the satisfaction of the complainant;
- d) instructions for customers to register changes, such as the billing address or the name of the person responsible for bill payment.

3.4.1.5 Upon request, the customer shall be:

- a) provided with any retained record of their billing and consumption history, to allow current balances to be checked;
- b) informed or provided with timely, accurate and current information about the supplier's billing terms and conditions, and on available billing products, services and options relevant to that customer.

3.4.1.6 All complaints received from customers shall be recorded and the customer shall be informed about the supplier's complaint handling procedure and how to obtain a copy. This procedure should clearly include the following:

- a) a commitment to deal with problems fully within a reasonable time limit;
- b) the redress that the customer may be offered;
- c) advice on how the customer may pursue their complaint if they remain dissatisfied, including details of any independent body that can provide advice or consider unresolved disputes.

3.4.2 Payment methods and processing

3.4.2.1 Payment options shall be clearly identified on the bill and on other relevant material, including when any concessions or additional charges will apply. Where possible, a full range of payment options, including debit or credit cards, mobile phone and online payment methods should be offered, as well as an option to make small payments in cash at convenient payment points, or payments using cash substitutes such as stamps.

3.4.2.2 Where direct debit is to be used, processes shall be established to:

- a) provide details of the intended payment arrangement to the customer's nominated financial institution in a timely manner, so as to facilitate the transaction taking place either on, or as soon as practicable after, the due date of payment;
- b) ensure that payment levels are based on the best information available and are clearly and accurately explained;
- c) explain why a credit balance built up by the customer is being retained and make publicly available the formula for calculating the balance and payment levels required to meet future consumption.

3.4.2.3 A documented policy shall be established for adjusting the level of direct debit if, allowing for seasonal variations, it is clear from readings provided by the customer that the direct debit no longer reflects actual or reasonably foreseeable usage. The policy shall indicate the conditions under which adjustments are made.

3.4.2.4 For customer enquiry purposes, processes shall be established to:

- a) note bill payments received in the relevant system(s) within two working days of receipt of the payment;
- b) update the account balance prior to generating the subsequent bill, if the customer's payment is received by the payment due date;
- c) process all other payments within five working days of receipt.

3.4.2.5 Where billing is delayed, customer payments on account shall be accepted.

3.4.2.6 A summary of payments made by the customer, including details of amounts and dates, shall be provided on the bill or statement in order to allow bill payments to be verified by the customer.

3.4.3 Debt collection and customers with difficulty in paying their bills

3.4.3.1 A clear documented policy shall be established for dealing with instances of non-payment of bills. This shall include provision of a reminder, a copy of the bill if requested, disconnection warning notices and, wherever practical, direct contact with the customer, prior to any disconnection or restriction of supply.

3.4.3.2 Policies and procedures shall be established for the effective assistance of customers in temporary or permanent financial hardship. These policies shall be clearly communicated to those customers who may need to take advantage of them and shall include arrangements for referral of customers to appropriate external counsellors or budget advisers, in order to provide assistance with the management of their finances.

3.4.3.3 Disconnection warning notices shall provide customers with details of the supplier's dispute resolution process and a free helpline number.

3.4.3.4 Where the supplier is providing an essential service to customers, “safety net” procedures shall be developed to ensure that the supply of the service to a customer in vulnerable circumstances is not knowingly withdrawn, unless all other options have been exhausted and a rigorous process has been followed and documented which confirms that the customer is deliberately withholding payment. The safety net procedures shall ensure that customers in vulnerable circumstances (including those who are elderly, disabled or chronically sick) and customers with young infants receive continued provision of an energy supply during the winter months and of water and sanitation services throughout the year. It shall also ensure the following:

- a) continued provision of the service until any outstanding dispute has been resolved;
- b) clear communications with the customer to warn them of the need to contact the supplier regarding the outstanding bill; these warning notices shall also provide the customer with details of the supplier’s dispute resolution process and a free helpline number;
- c) alternative payment options are offered which reflect the customer’s ability to pay;
- d) at least two separate attempts are made to contact the customer by telephone, by correspondence and by personal visit;
- e) attempts are made to investigate the circumstances of non-payment and contact is made with other bodies which may be able to assist the customer.

3.4.3.5 Where responsibility for collection of an outstanding debt is passed to a third party, procedures shall be established to ensure the following:

- a) the customer is notified at the time that the debt is assigned unless the customer has already been notified in advance that the debt will be assigned;
- b) clear contact details for the collection agency are provided at the time that the debt is assigned, or upon request;
- c) the agency meets the relevant requirements of this International Standard;
- d) responsibility for resolution of any disputes raised by the customer is retained by the supplier.

3.4.3.6 Debts should not be passed to a third party collection agency where there is a legitimate outstanding dispute at the root of the reason for the customer withholding payment.

3.4.3.7 Where the customer is experiencing financial hardship and is unable to pay the outstanding balance due in full, terms for repayment of the outstanding balance over an extended period shall be offered which reflect the customer’s ability to pay.

3.5 Customers in vulnerable circumstances

3.5.1 Effective policies and procedures for identifying and then managing the needs of customers who may be vulnerable shall be established and operated. These procedures shall include detailed guidance to assist staff in the identification of a vulnerable customer, in order to ensure that specialist support is provided where a customer is unable to deal with the matter due to a difficulty in understanding the advice given or because they are unable to take the necessary action. Processes shall also be established to ensure that customers can contact their supplier easily, access complaint handling procedures and obtain appropriate redress where necessary. Customers may be vulnerable due to the following:

- a) the complexity of the issue;
- b) their personal circumstances;
- c) the urgency of the issue;
- d) a combination of these factors.

NOTE The factors that can cause customers to be at particular risk of vulnerability can be short- or long-term, or can fluctuate over time depending on the issue or their personal circumstances. Common risk factors include age, disability, mental health, low income, poor language, literacy or numeracy skills, inexperience and a sudden change of circumstances.

3.5.2 A register of customers and consumers for whom special needs are known to exist (e.g. elderly, disabled and chronically sick customers with specific requirements) shall be established. Measures shall also be devised and implemented to ensure that the existence and purpose of the register is promoted to the intended beneficiaries and their carers and, where relevant, to health and social care professionals and practitioners. As a minimum, such customers shall be informed that they have the right for their bills and related information to be:

- a) provided through a variety of channels in alternative accessible formats (e.g. Braille, large print, audio or translated into other languages), or
- b) sent to a nominated third party, which will deal directly with the supplier on any account or billing enquiry.

3.5.3 Procedures shall be established to ensure that customers in vulnerable circumstances have received and understood the information provided.

3.5.4 Systems shall be established and promoted which provide for positive identification of employees and agents visiting customer premises (e.g. a password scheme).

3.6 End of contract and switching supplier

3.6.1 Procedures shall be established to enable customers to terminate the contract and/or transfer easily to an alternative supplier at the end of the contract and/or upon provision by the customer of the required notice. These procedures shall ensure the following:

- a) there are no unnecessary barriers to switching and/or termination;
- b) transfers are completed within agreed timescales;
- c) any information required by the customer is provided in a timely manner;
- d) where necessary, targets are set for the exchange of information with the acquiring supplier or other industry bodies and performance meets the agreed targets;
- e) communications customers can easily transfer their telephone number to their new supplier.

3.6.2 The final bill shall be sent to the customer by a date no later than six weeks after termination of service, or within the period stated in the supplier's terms and conditions for the relevant service, if earlier.

3.6.3 If the final bill is issued and paid in full, the customer shall not be subsequently billed for any late charges that were not included in the original bill, even if the customer subsequently returns to the same supplier.

3.6.4 Unless specifically covered by the supplier's complaints process, a documented policy shall be established and made publicly available to regularly update former customers on the status of any matters that may remain in dispute after this period.

3.7 Compliance and continuous improvement

3.7.1 A documented system shall be in place to ensure compliance with this International Standard, and effective quality assurance techniques or audits shall be established to monitor compliance on a regular basis.

3.7.2 A system of monitoring performance shall be established to promote continuous improvement for billing, and an ongoing review of the supplier's billing practices shall be maintained through the following:

- a) systematically collecting and recording data on complaints and enquiries for the purpose of enhancing information management and service provision relating to billing;

NOTE Data collection methods include monitoring call centre calls and encouraging feedback from customer service/call centre staff.

- b) keeping abreast of best practice regarding billing practices;
- c) fostering a compliance culture in relation to this International Standard within the organization, including employing people who have experience of, and commitment to, the continuous improvement of billing practices;
- d) undertaking specific training and retraining of staff to foster better billing practices.

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Annex A (informative)

Guidance for bill presentation

A.1 Colour and contrast

The choice of colour is important for ease of recognition and ease of seeing. Some colour combinations are also more effective (e.g. some colours, such as red/green, cannot be distinguished by a significant minority of the population who are colour blind).

General purpose combinations, such as black on yellow or light grey, provide strong definition without too much glare. Conversely, pastel shades on pastel backgrounds, or red on light grey, are difficult to see and should normally be avoided.

Colour coding (e.g. the use of red on reminder bills) should not be used as the only means of conveying information or distinguishing a vital element. All information conveyed with colour should also be available without the perception of colour.

A.2 Size and style of font

The required size of font relates to the probable viewing distance, the level of illumination and the colour contrast of the text against its background. The choice of font, with or without serif, in upright form or italics, and light, medium or bold appearance, also has a significant impact on legibility. Text written in capital letters is more difficult to read. All these factors have particular significance for those with a visual impairment.

Bibliography

- [1] ISO 10002, *Quality management — Customer satisfaction — Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations*

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