

# Many facing problems with pre-payment meters

A fifth of energy pre-payment customers in Scotland face being left with no heating and hot water each month.

One in five Scots who pay for their energy on a meter regularly experience having their gas supply cut off.

## Scots struggling to feed their gas meters

With a long, cold winter seemingly on its way, gas and electricity supplies are more important than ever before. And north of the border is where the harshest conditions are often expected.

So it's disturbing to learn that more and more Scots are struggling to pay their energy bills, and many are even facing having their precious heating supplies cut off.

## Gas supplies regularly cut

Research by debt advice and solutions provider Debt Advisory Centre Scotland (see [www.dacscotland.co.uk](http://www.dacscotland.co.uk) for more information on the service) shows that one in five customers who pre-pay their gas bills face being cut off every single month as they can't feed their meters.

That's 19% of customers in Scotland having their supply cut at least once a month – and usually many more times. Customers who pre-pay just for electricity fare slightly better, with 15% of customers in Scotland losing their electricity supply at least once a month.

So, this winter there could be a lot of people suffering from a lack of heating and hot water just when they need it the

most. And although many people can survive without too many problems, when it comes to the old, the young and the frail, having no heating during winter can be a killer.

### **How do meters work?**

Customers have to constantly feed their meters, effectively buying their gas and electricity up front, rather than paying by direct debit as they go. Losing access to energy on this scale can be a huge problem for people with small children, but it's a massive inconvenience for anyone.

[Pre-payment meters](#) do come fitted with some emergency credit meant to help customers through times when they physically can't get to a shop to top up their pre-payment cards or buy more tokens for their meter. But this isn't enough for those who literally don't have the money to pay into their meters.

### **Emergency credit not enough**

As the emergency credit meant to tide customers over is usually around £10 maximum, this is only enough to last a few days if the users are extremely careful. However, as this has to be paid back immediately, it doesn't actually help those who are struggling to pay. If customers can't afford the top up then they can't afford to pay back the emergency supply either.

It's yet another example of how easy it is to spiral into debt, with the added problem of missing out on vital necessities during the harshest weather conditions of the year.

Ian Williams of the Debt Advisory Centre Scotland said:- "We did the research in October, before the cold weather set in and before the recently announced price increases. It's likely that things will only get worse, and it's highly likely that even more people will find themselves stuck in the cold and dark as the [winter progresses](#). If the real reason you can't

afford to feed the gas and electricity meter is that you are struggling with unsecured debt repayments, it's important to seek help sooner rather than later – as interest and charges can mount up and make things worse.”

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