

Media Release

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Top Energy to increase community payout

Payment now a credit on power bills

Electricity account holders in the Far North will this year have their annual lines charge discount credited directly to their power bills instead of receiving a cheque. The move has allowed the Far North's electricity network operator, Top Energy, to pass on to the community nearly a million dollars more than last year.

This year all electricity bill payers will have a minimum discount of \$150 credited to their power accounts. Most (90.5 percent) will get \$200. Last year 74 percent got \$200 and 16 percent got less than \$150.

"By treating the annual lines charge payment as a discount we're able to make real savings in the costs involved," said Top Energy Chief Executive Russell Shaw.

"This means that more people will get more money, like some elderly folk and young couples. But the flip-side is that electricity account holders won't be receiving the cheques they're used to. One of the tax rules we had to comply with was that the money had to be paid through the electricity retailers, to consumers through their electricity accounts."

The lines charge discount will appear as a one-off credit line on the electricity bills that people in the Far North receive during November. The move should free up cash for all electricity account holders, regardless of how they pay their power bills.

For those who get a monthly bill, either by email or through the post, the Top Energy lines charge discount will be credited to their accounts by their electricity retailers and they will get a lower bill than usual. It's the same for direct debit payments.

Those who pay by Automatic Payment will be able to reduce the amount they pay at each instalment, or put a stop to payments for a while. And people with pre-paid electricity accounts can check their balances and choose whether or not to make their usual payments.

Shaw said the company had discussed the pros and cons of the change with the trustees of the Top Energy Consumer Trust, the organisation that represents the community's interests in the region's electricity network. The trustees, who are all members of the community, had agreed that switching to a discount on power bills is, overall, in the best interests of consumers.

"It makes sense not only in terms of the additional money we're able to pass back to the people of the Far North, but also because it's a fairer and more effective way to make the payment," he said.

Each year cheques totalling about \$150,000 are never presented. This new approach will ensure everyone benefits from the lines charge discounts they're entitled to.

"People also get the benefit immediately, without having to do a thing," Shaw said. "Power accounts will be credited automatically and people don't have to worry about cheques being lost, stolen or destroyed. Fixing problems like these saves both time and money, benefitting everyone."

The annual discount credited to bills is intended to become a permanent feature.

"Top Energy is doing everything it can to explain to the community the reasons for the change," Shaw said. "The company is sending explanatory information directly to electricity account holders, both in the post and with some paper bills, as well as running a radio advertising campaign and briefing community leaders."

A special website has also been set up for those with internet access and can be reached through Top Energy's usual internet address, www.topenergy.co.nz.

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