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Overarching standards of conduct for energy suppliers

What are these standards of conduct and who do they apply to?

In October 2009, new overarching standards of conduct, for governing energy suppliers' behaviour, were introduced. Suppliers are now expected to follow these standards when dealing with their domestic and micro-business customers.

What is a micro-business?

A micro business is a business which:

- has fewer than 10 employees
- a turnover of less than two million Euro p/a
- or uses less than 55,000 kWh of electricity or less than 200,000 kWh of gas a year

How will suppliers now be expected to behave?

The standards of conduct are new guidelines which suppliers are required to take into account when dealing with their customers. The standards are:

- Suppliers should now only sell their customers a product or service which they fully understand and that is suitable for their individual needs
- Suppliers must not change anything material about a customer's product or service without clearly explaining why
- Suppliers must not prevent a customer from switching products or supplier without good reason
- Suppliers must not offer products which are unnecessarily complex or confusing.
- Suppliers must make it easy for customers to contact them and act promptly and in an appropriate manner when addressing mistakes they have made

What will happen if my supplier doesn't meet these standards?

These standards are not a license condition and therefore suppliers will not be fined if they break or ignore them. Instead, they are intended to act as a guide for appropriate behaviour by energy suppliers. These standards will be used by the energy industry regulator, Ofgem, when investigating any potential breaches of the licence conditions. These standards are expected to send a powerful message to suppliers that they are to treat their customers fairly at all times.

How will Consumer Focus be using these Standards?

Consumer Focus will use these standards as a guide when dealing with suppliers and when necessary we will use them to remind suppliers of the standards they are expected to abide by when dealing with you, the customer. We hope they will prove to be a useful tool in driving suppliers into improving their performance and therefore, your experiences of the energy market.

What do these standards mean for me and will I benefit from them?

Consumer Focus hopes that these standards of conduct will ensure all suppliers have a common set of principles to abide by when dealing with you.

If you are a domestic or micro-business customer, one of the main improvements to the market which you will hopefully be able to benefit from is a switch in suppliers' focus - from internal processes to your experiences of those processes as a customer.

As a result of these standards of conduct:

- You should now be able to compare the products which your supplier offers more easily
- You will be more confident when dealing with your supplier that you are being treated fairly at all times

- You should now benefit from having access to full, clear and accurate information from your supplier. This should enable you to better understand the service you are being provided and whether you could benefit from switching in order to access a better deal

In short, you should now benefit from the availability of clearer information within the energy market and a better and more courteous customer service.

