



CER Press Release - 8th August 2011

CER Launches New Framework for Price Comparison Websites

The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) has today launched a new system for accrediting websites that compare energy suppliers' gas and electricity prices. Under this new framework, a website providing an energy price comparison service will only be accredited by the CER if it meets defined standards, for example in terms of its accuracy and reliability. This will help provide energy customers with the confidence to use these websites, assisting them in "shopping around" for the best tariff deal.

In recent years the Irish electricity and gas retail (supply) markets have become increasingly competitive, with many energy suppliers now competing for customers. For example, since early 2009 over 40% of Irish electricity customers have switched supplier, one of the highest switching rates seen in Europe. This has given Irish energy customers choice and price discounts, which is of particular value in this difficult economic climate. This competitive marketplace means that energy customers now have the opportunity to choose a wide range of electricity and gas tariffs from different suppliers.

Price comparison websites can be an invaluable tool in helping energy customers to decide the best deal for themselves. To assist customers in reliably comparing different energy tariffs, the new framework will accredit a price comparison website only if it meets certain prescribed standards, such as independence, impartiality and accuracy. There will also be a monitoring system whereby any CER-accredited website that fails to meet these standards will have their accreditation removed. This should help energy customers in comparing tariff offers and in getting the best deal to suit their needs.

More generally, the CER encourages customers to "shop around" and look at the different tariff offers available from their own and other energy suppliers, based on fuel type, billing/payment options and tariff structures. In addition, as some suppliers offer discounts against their own or a competitor's "standard tariff", it should be noted that if the "standard tariff" is increased, while the percentage discount may stay the same, the rate the customer is charged may increase. It is important for customers to pay attention to the detail of different tariff offers, and the CER's new accreditation framework for price comparison websites should assist with this. Finally, information on energy supplier switching can be found at the CER's www.energycustomers.ie customer website.

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"Notes to Editors" follows.

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- The CER is the independent body responsible for regulating the electricity and natural gas sectors in Ireland. The CER protects customers by working for a safe, secure and sustainable supply of electricity and natural gas, as well as a competitive market which delivers reasonable prices and a good quality service. For further details please see www.cer.ie and the CER's customer website, www.energycustomers.ie .
 - Strong competition has developed in both the electricity and gas retail (supply) markets in recent years, with over 40% of electricity customers and 20% of gas customers having switched supplier in Ireland. This has provided energy customers with supplier choice and the opportunity to avail of significant price discounts.
 - Due to this strong competition, in March 2011 the CER published its decision to end price regulation for domestic (residential) electricity customers. The decision enabled Electric Ireland to set its own electricity prices for domestic customers from 4th April. This should help provide further customer choice and tariff options.
 - Today's CER decision on a new website comparison framework is part of a series of CER customer initiatives aimed at helping customers to get the most out of the competitive retail marketplace. Customer protection initiatives being progressed by the CER also include customer education, a requirement on sales personnel calling to homes to provide a doorstep checklist, a requirement for suppliers to provide detailed consumption information on bills and the protection of vulnerable customers.
 - Any tariff comparison website that wishes to be accredited under the new framework should apply to the CER using the application form published today on the CER's website, following the process detailed in the associated decision paper.
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