



80% of smart meter users would recommend them to friends and family.*

Smart meters: what's the benefit?

The next generation of intelligent gas and electricity monitors is being rolled out across the UK, with the 2020 deadline fast approaching. But are they a good thing? **Yvette Murrell** investigates



The future of energy consumption – a smart meter In-Home Display.

It's that time of year again. The days are getting shorter, nights are getting cooler, and couples begin arguing about whether to turn the heating up or just throw on another jumper. Sound familiar? What we can all agree on, though, is that no one wants to be landed with an extortionate estimate energy bill come the new year. But with smart meters, we now have the potential to see just how much energy we consume in near real-time – be it hourly, weekly, or monthly – right down to pounds and pence.

Smart meters are replacing traditional models, and are installed in the same place and way – in a cupboard or outside of your home. But unlike the old meters, the energy consumption data is automatically sent to your energy supplier, eliminating the need to remember to send readings yourself or let someone into your home to record them. Crucially, this means your energy bills are accurate, so you will only pay for what you actually use. But how can you track this? Smart meters

come with an In-Home Display (IHD) unit, which is a small electrical device you can place anywhere to see exactly how much energy you are using.

By 2020, energy suppliers must offer all of their customers a smart meter replacement for free – but there is no legal obligation to take one if you don't want to. Citizens Advice are urging the government to extend the deadline to 2023, to allow more time for quality installations, minimise any issues or faults with hurriedly fitted systems, and give energy suppliers enough time to roll out the programme with maximum effectiveness. The idea is for us to all be smarter with the way we use energy. By being able to see how your lighting, cooking, washing, and heating usage affects your energy bill, you can begin to make small adjustments to reduce it – and, in turn, cut costs. Win.

It's worth noting smart meters also work for those with pre-pay meters. Only you will now be able to top up online or via an app, rather than having to dash down to the local newsagent when you run out – and you'll see when you are running

low, too, thanks to the IHD. "Installation of smart meters in homes across the country is bringing us closer to a smarter, cleaner, and greener future," says Robert Cheesewright, director of policy and communications at Smart Energy GB. "They are making life easier, helping you save money and bringing an end to estimated bills and confusion around energy use and what a bill breakdown means."

"Smart meters are making life easier, helping you save money and bringing an end to estimated bills and confusion around energy use and what a bill breakdown even means"

With clever monitors, instant connectivity, and transparent billing, the rollout brings the country's National Grid up to current standard, ensuring it at least begins to catch up with modern-day life. So many other things are now smart – from our phones to appliances and TVs – it seems long overdue one of the most important aspects of our lives is up to date as well.

In the near future, smart meters will be able to interact with other smart appliances. For example, your washing machine will be able to automatically run a cycle at the cheapest time of day. Now that's pretty clever, right? You can rest assured when it comes to safety, too. All smart meters are protected by a security system developed with the help of the Government Communications Headquarters' National Cyber Security Centre.

Once the rollout is complete, all meters will have the same smart functionality – so should you wish to change supplier at any time, it will be seamless. With a smart meter, you can finally put that heating argument to rest – and possibly even those extra jumpers, too. **KBB**