

Power bill shock one of many

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PETALING JAYA: The National Consumer Complaints Centre receives "a lot of complaints" regarding electricity billing disputes.

Its senior manager Matheevani Marathandam said the bulk of complaints was similar to the predicament faced by Lee Siow Eng, 45, who received a bill for RM10,684.56 after Tenaga Nasional (TNB) claimed his meter was tampered with. *theSun* reported yesterday that Lee received the bill in January, three months after TNB replaced the meter at his Sungai Way house.

When contacted, a TNB officer familiar with Lee's case said that the charges were backdated to 2005 when power usage at Lee's house dropped significantly. However, the officer said she did not know why TNB officers had not gone to check the meter six years ago.

Although she was unable to provide immediate figures, Matheevani said, based on the complaints, many consumers were unhappy that there was no proper breakdown of back charges, and that it was all based on estimation. Some consumers received quite hefty bills also.

"TNB should provide a breakdown of the charges and proof of tampering in the interest of fairness. It cannot be based on an assumption, there must be a proper and transparent calculation method presented to consumers. They cannot just slap a high amount on the consumer," she said.

"If consumers are guilty of tampering, it is TNB's right to

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Onus on TNB to check meter

penalise them. But TNB must give consumers a fair hearing to explain or justify the drop in usage," she said.

Water and Energy Consumer Association representative Ratna Devi Nadarajan said it was the responsibility of TNB, not the consumer, to check the meter.

"If the usage in a house drops significantly, TNB should ask the home owner to explain. It can't just simply charge the customer years later," said Ratna.

Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia president S. Piarapakaran concurred, saying that the Energy Commission and TNB should look into creating a standard operating procedure to avoid backcharging of hefty sums.

"For example, if usage drops by over 20% for three months or more, TNB can put an 'alert' on the account and seek an explanation. But if the house owner cannot provide an answer, TNB officers can check and take appropriate action," said Piarapakaran.

He said he has seen unscrupulous salesmen hawking devices that will interfere with meter readings.

"However, with a proper monitoring system in place, it will deter tampering because people will know they're being watched," he said, adding it will also prevent nasty surprises like Lee's from happening.

Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations president Datuk N. Marimuthu declined to comment, saying that the matter should be referred to the consumer associations under Fomca.

In 2009, Fomca signed a RM1.5 million agreement with TNB for an energy efficiency campaign that will run for 24 months.

TNB was still unable to provide a statement at press time.