



UTILITY METERING SOLUTIONS LTD  
Nottingham, England

Landlords – 10 things you should know about Electricity Meters

*If you are not sure what type of meter you should fit in order to provide your tenants with accurate and reliable bills then read on as Alan Ward of UMS Ltd provides a useful introduction to the field of electricity metering.*

The subject of metering for tenant billing still causes a great deal of confusion amongst landlords, asset managers and consultants. So here is a quick run through of things you should be aware of:

1. You must use an Ofgem approved meter

Electricity meters are governed primarily by the 1989 Electricity Act. According to the legislation any meter used for billing purposes must be of an approved pattern or type. Basically, you can only use meters of a design and construction approved by Ofgem. This rules out almost all panel mounted meters available on the market however accurate they claim to be.

2. How can you find out if a meter being offered is approved?

The supplier should be able to provide you with a copy of the “*Certificate of Approval*” for the meter in question or you can check on the Ofgem website to see if it is listed in schedule 4 of SI 1566, the statutory register of all UK pattern approved meters.

3. The meter does not need to be certified

Meters used by a licensed electricity supplier have to be certified except in the case of commercial and industrial situations if a written agreement is made with the customer before installation. Certification is a process carried out at a test station and meters are checked to ensure they conform to their pattern approval and are accurate. The meters are then sealed and allocated a certification life (how long they can be used before being taken off circuit and replaced).

For unlicensed electricity suppliers such as landlords, meters do not need to be certified but the owner is required to use an approved type and keep it in good order.

4. The tenant has a right to read their meter.

This is a basic right when it comes to metering. It applies to landlord / tenant situations and should be taken into account when designing any new system.

5. All suppliers, including landlords, are required to read and inspect meters at least every two years to take a reading and check that the meter is in good order. This ensures that bills are not perpetually based upon estimated readings and the landlord can ensure that the meter connections are safe and have not been tampered with.

6. Even if Ofgem approved billing meters have been fitted, they cannot be relied upon to be reading accurately unless they are installed in the correct manner and in accordance with the manufacturers instructions.

In my 16 years experience checking sub metering installations there have only been a few occasions where no wiring faults have been found. Apart from the obvious problem of current transformers fitted the wrong way round I have seen every possible fault from meters being connected to the wrong supply to meters not being connected to anything.

It is sensible to ask the contractor to provide a commissioning report from the manufacturer or distributor before signing off any new scheme.

#### 7. Automatic meter reading & pulsed outputs

Pulsed outputs are a crude and often unreliable source of data. Pulses are easily lost or created and over time there will be drift between the reading on the meter and the reading generated in the PC. If you want to provide tenants with reliable bills go for a system using meters with serial communications and authenticated readings. That way the readings will always be reliable.

8. Don't be confused by the Building Regulations when it comes to tenant metering In accordance with the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive now incorporated into part L2 of the Building Regulations, each separate building or tenanted area over 500m<sup>2</sup> should be metered. Although the regulations do not mention the type of meter to use, if it is for billing purposes it must still be Ofgem approved.

9. Many Ofgem approved electricity meters have load survey capability, including single phase residential meters. Landlords are keen to offer competitive rates for electricity in order to attract tenants so why not offer value added energy management services and help them use electricity more efficiently. This can be done by providing an energy report with the bill or by allowing tenants to download energy usage data from a website.

10. Finally, when looking at investing in a metering scheme make sure you deal with a company that can offer expert advice and supply products from manufacturers able to provide lifetime support for the meter.

#### *Note on the author:*

*Alan Ward BSc worked for the electricity meter manufacturer PRI for 16 years before leaving to set up his own company Utility Metering Solutions Ltd in order to provide customers with turnkey metering systems. Details can be found on the website*

*[www.umsmeters.co.uk](http://www.umsmeters.co.uk)*