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Put the chill on those winter bills

DAVID NANKERVIS

RISING electricity prices have sparked a surge in householders looking to switch retailers to save money, new figures show.

The search for cheaper deals follows announcements of annual bill increases of up to \$261 a year by energy retailers last week.

Since then financial comparison website iSelect Energy has recorded a fivefold increase in energy inquiries from South Australian householders.

Welfare agencies have urged electricity customers to seek a better deal as a result of the surge in power bills which take effect from July 1.

Spokeswoman for iSelect

Energy Laura Crowden said many consumers hadn't reviewed their electricity contract in years.

Ms Crowden said many weren't taking advantage of discount offers currently available to new customers.

"The best way to save money is to make sure you are on a plan which offers discounted rates and cost effec-

tive tariffs suited to your consumption patterns," she said. "Increasing energy market competition means more providers willing to compete for your business."

University student Marie Rocca from Walkerville said surging power bills provided an incentive for young people to continue living with their parents.

"One reason it's hard for young people to move out is the cost of energy," the 23-year-old, who also works in retail sales part-time, said.

"We don't run the heater while sleeping and have it IC lower in the day to save a few dollars."

The state's biggest energy retailers blamed rising generation costs for the bill hike. AGL increased average electricity bills by \$228 a year, EnergyAustralia by \$261 and Origin by \$117.

Treasurer Tom Koutsantonis urged householders to shop around for better prices. The Opposition blamed the State Government for increases, blaming promotion of higher priced wind power.

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GREAT TIPS FOR SAVING ENERGY

- 1** Get the maximum discount on your energy bills. In South Australia, annual bills can vary up to \$1000 depending on the retailer. Ask your retailer for discounts – or threaten to switch.
- 2** Monitor your power usage with a “smart” electricity meter or in-home electricity display, which will help identify appliances that draw excessive power when not in use.
- 3** Heat your water off-peak if possible. In some areas, “time of use” rates are available.
- 4** Get rid of your garage fridge. It can cost hundreds of dollars a year to run an inefficient 20-year-old fridge.
- 5** Ditch your super-hot plasma. Newer models can use one-tenth of the electricity.
- 6** Install a modern showerhead, which use as little as 5 litres of water per minute. Old showerheads use up to 35 litres per minute.
- 7** Insulate exposed hot water pipes, including the hot water system pressure-relief valve on your hot water tank.
- 8** Check your heaters and airconditioning. Gas heating should be checked at least every two years by a qualified person.
- 9** Inspect your ducts – poorly installed or degraded ductwork can lead to big energy losses, which can go unnoticed for decades.
- 10** Banish drafts, by plastering over wall vents, sealing off unused chimneys and filling cracks.
- 11** Eliminate ceiling-mounted downlights where possible. A few modern wide-beam LEDs can replace a larger number of narrow-beam halogen downlights.
- 12** Install covers over downlights that protrude into accessible attic spaces to reduce airflow through the roof and fire hazards.
- 13** Replace regularly used lights with LEDs, which use a tenth of the energy of halogen or incandescent bulbs.
- 14** Insulate your attic. If already insulated, check it meets the recommended “R value” for your climate.
- 15** Floor and wall insulation helps keep heat in.
- 16** Cover your windows with drapes, curtains or blinds to keep heat in during winter and out in summer.
- 17** Trees, plants, external awnings, blinds and shade sails can keep out the summer sun.
- 18** Double-glazing for windows cuts out noise, improves security and saves energy.
- 19** Fit swimming pools with a cover to stop the water cooling overnight and to minimise cleaning, chemical use and filter pump running time.
- 20** If your home has reverse-cycle air conditioning, it may be cheaper to run than gas heating.
- 21** If your hot water system is nearing its use-by date, consider replacing it with a heat pump – especially if you already have solar panels and low feed-in tariffs.
- 22** If you eliminate all gas usage in your home, you can eliminate your gas bill with its nearly \$1 per day fixed supply charges.

 CUT OUT AND PUT ON YOUR FRIDGE



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SNUGGLE UP: Marie Rocca, 22, and Annabel Keeves, 19 try to keep warm without burning up their electricity prices. Picture: TRICIA WATKINSON