

Extracts from The Standard

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Deals slash power bills Farmers in line for \$3000 savings

SOUTH-WEST farmers could save \$1500-\$3000 a year on their power bills by negotiating a better off-peak rate over three years, EnergyWatch managing director Ben Polis said yesterday.

Mr Polis said the amount saved by negotiating through EnergyWatch depended on farm size, the number of accounts and energy consumption. But he said south-west farmers were traditionally on very high electricity rates because of their distance from the Gippsland power generators. "Western Victoria is a target market for us, but we can't physically do all the farms in western Victoria in December. It's first-in best-dressed because we are the only service in Australia that does this."

Mr Polis said EnergyWatch was an independent organization that helped consumers and businesses get the best energy deal. It is paid by the retailer that a consumer nominated. EnergyWatch also offers a free consumer hotline that assesses a consumer's power rate and showed how it could be reduced.

In late November EnergyWatch launched a dairy farmers electricity and gas group discount program in Victoria with the aim of locking in cheaper rates before January 1, 2009. General farming and residential accounts were also accepted. Mr Polis said the government standard regulated tariff for power was abolished for commercial accounts this year and would be dropped for residences on January 1. This meant retailers renegotiating customers into 12-month contracts might offer initial discounts but could also lift rates annually, he said.

Mr Polis said most of the state's power users, including farmers, were coming out of retail electricity contracts this month. In the past two weeks 500 dairy farmers had faxed EnergyWatch 2000 accounts for review. "A lot of them signed up with Country Energy which is a New South Wales government-owned retailer they had a fantastic off peak rate," he said. But because the price of power had gone up over the last two years farmers renewing contracts were faced with power prices double their previous off-peak rate, he said. Mr Polis said farmers who stayed with their current retailer would be quoted a 12-month rate whereas EnergyWatch would negotiate a three-year rate so retailers could not put the rate up during the contract. "If they lock it in now they (the retailers) can't do a thing about it."

See energywatch.com.au

