

Headline	SESB allowed to collect security deposit		
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# SESB allowed to collect security deposit

**Oliver Voon**

KOTA KINABALU: Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd (SESB) clarified that the Electricity Supply Act of Malaysia, approved by Parliament, grants the licensee to obtain a security deposit from customers.

It said this in response to complaints about the increase in customer's existing security deposits.

Consumers contend that the demand came without prior written notice as required under the Electricity Supply Act 1990.

A clause in Section 28 ( 2 ) of this Law has clearly stated: Where the person has not given the security in sub-section (1) or the security given by the person has become insufficient, the licensee may by notice require the person, within seven days after the service of the notice, to give him reasonable security for the payment of all monies which are due to him in respect of the supply and if the person fails to give such security, the licensee may, if he thinks fit, discontinue the supply until the security is given.

Some callers opined that the demand was to enable the company's fixed deposit to grow for the benefit of the share holders, while others asked whether a fraction of the sum would be returned in the event their monthly power use dropped substantially and consistently.

A SESB spokesman said the initial amount of deposit for electricity was equivalent to the estimated electricity consumption for two months.

"The amount calculated was based on the two months average of the last six months actual consumption," he said, adding that the deposit is calculated automatically by their electronic billing system.

He said it would return the difference in amount from their deposit on the request of customers if the average two-month usage was less than the deposit charged.

The deposit charged to customers is in line with the Licence Supply Regulations, Electricity Regulation 1990, which requires customers to pay a deposit "within a seven-day period from the time of demand".

"This amount is enough to cover the estimated cost of electricity usage and equipment rental for two months.

"The deposit paid by the customers is not an advance payment on their monthly electricity bills nor to pay arrears in bill payment in the past," he said.

Residents who complained were from Kg Hungab, Penampang, Taman Likas Garden and Kg Kembirian in Menggatal, in the *Hotline*.

"Our investigation revealed that the average monthly power usage for the Penampang resident concerned was RM172.84," the spokesman said. It was RM370.17 for the Likas resident and RM420.17 for the Menggatal resident.

"These figures were based on their latest six months' consumption," he said.

Based on their average electricity usage, the spokesman stressed that the additional deposit was justifiable in view that the existing sum was no longer sufficient to support any liability (if any) in the event of damage to their equipment.

"The amount may also no longer be enough to settle the arrears when the customer closes account later," he said, adding that the complainants or their representatives had been briefed on the matter.

Those still vague about the calculation may contact their Toll free number at 1-800-88-1135 or proceed to the nearest SESB office.

The Likas resident felt SESB should issue a notice prior to demanding for an increase in the sum of deposit in her

existing electricity account. The latter was shocked when required to top up the amount of deposit she had initially placed which amounted to RM500 last year.

"I'm not running a business in this old house but why out of a sudden they wanted me to add another RM250 in my account?" asked VENUS, who lives in Taman Likas Garden. Her monthly electricity bills are in the region of RM300 to RM390.

She reiterated that the amount suddenly became part of the payable figures in her account. "I thought they are only supposed to do that when my usage of electricity has increased in a couple of months," she said. Power consumption in her house shot up to RM438.05 recently.

She argued that SESB should not "jump the gun" on the matter as they need to obtain the latest average usage for two or three months before making the call.

"In my case, my usage only went above RM400 in my latest bill and not before that," she added.

In Menggatal, a resident there bemoaned similar "increase" in the amount of existing deposit but this case is rather peculiar as it demanded for

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RM600 although the average monthly usage is RM350 to RM400.

“Even a big towkay (tycoon) will be speechless because of this,” stressed JON, who placed a RM250 deposit initially.

In this day and age where the cost of living is gradually rising, he lamented he does not have the means to pay the additional cost due to other responsibilities that he needs to settle on a monthly basis.

“If I pay that amount in full and also my current electricity usage, what is left in my salary to use for the entire month?” he asked.

Jennifer of Kampung Hungab was at a loss to understand why she was asked to top up as much as RM146.75 on her existing deposit which was RM200 despite her normal monthly usage being below RM200.

“I did some renovations in my house in December last year and the bill for that month shot up to RM201.05 but why they immediately asked for more deposit from me?” she asked.

She was among those who felt that SESB should monitor their customers’ monthly power usage consecutively for at least two months before making such call.