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1 New Housing Companies Act promotes methodical planning



The new legislation changes housing company practices. A shareholder now has to inform the company in advance in writing of any repair and maintenance work to be done in the apartment. The housing company also has to inform shareholders of any future refurbishment works and those already carried out.

Matti Välimäki Illustration Anssi Keränen

The new Housing Companies Act came into force on 1 July 2010. The aim was to clarify the law. Its purpose is to increase housing safety and promote methodical planning of repair work.

The basis for the division of responsibility remains the same as before. The shareholder is primarily responsible for repairs and wear and tear inside the apartment, whereas items such as heating, water and drain pipes are the housing company's responsibility.

Previously a verbal notification was sufficient.

For the shareholder, a key reform is that a written notice to the housing company, instead of a verbal one, is now required for many alteration and refurbishment works. The company will grant permission, ask for further clarification, or prohibit the work.

Senior Lawyer of the Finnish Real Estate Federation, **Anu Kärkkäinen**, says that the aim is to prevent difficult disputes.

Well-planned and properly done

As a written notification reveals who is doing what and when, the company has a better chance than previously of assessing whether or not a project is likely to affect the whole housing company in any way. The aim of the reform is also to guide shareholders towards better planning of their maintenance and repair work and to using professional workers.

"It's worth taking care over the people you employ to carry out various repair jobs. The person commissioning the works is only entitled to the domestic help tax credit if the service provider has a Business ID number. Only certified electricians are allowed to carry out electrical installations. It is also good to check the credit rating of the business. It is not at all rare to find that when problems arise the persons who carried out the work are nowhere to be found", Kärkkäinen reminds us.

Electrical socket, installing a stove, changing a tap ...

A written notification is now also required for many jobs that might seem minor. The notification requirement now includes, for example, fitting a new socket, installing a fixed-connection stove, changing a tap, and installing parquet or laminate in place of plastic flooring.

"Unprofessional electrical work can be dangerous and can damage the electrical system of the whole building. The wrong kind of tap can cause noise and pressure problems in other apartments. If the noise insulation of parquet or laminate flooring has not been properly done, the residents below will suffer."

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2 Best service comes from smooth teamwork

Helsingin Energia has the most satisfied private and business customers in the energy industry. The result is confirmed in the EPSI Rating survey, which places us as the best Finnish power company in 2009 and 2010.

We are proud of these results. High-quality customer service has for years been a matter of honour for us, and we have invested in it. The advisory work of our Energy Advisory Centre also has a long tradition, and its services are unique in Finland. The need for energy advice increases continually. We have prepared for this by expanding our expertise to new areas, including home lighting and different forms of heating.

In order to serve our customers successfully on a daily basis, we must have easy-to-use, reliable products. The development of products and services is led by customer needs. Various options guarantee that every customer can find the product best suited to their circumstances.

Providing high-quality service is always a challenge to staff and their competence levels. For us, attaining this objective in a rapidly changing operating environment requires continuous learning, training, and the focused maintenance of knowledge and skills.

As our customers, dear readers, you have an important role in our joint teamwork and its success. You have enthusiastically participated in the development of our services year after year. We receive a lot of feedback from you: thanks, criticism, and ideas for development. The feedback helps us to create better services and to develop as more competent customer service professionals.

Our warmest thanks for helping us work together so efficiently. Let's stay in touch!

Best wishes for a sunny winter and spring,

Heli-Anne Kivinen
Manager, Customer Services



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The company or the property manager is not allowed to charge for handling a notification of small jobs, such as tap changing. The shareholder can be charged an administration fee, for example if an external expert is required to check plans or work specifications.

Requirements also for housing companies

The housing company must present a written statement of repair requirements for the next five years at the company meeting. The law also requires a written statement of previous major repair works carried out by the housing company.

“The idea behind the new statement of maintenance requirements is to steer housing companies towards more methodically planned renovations. It is also a good document to have alongside a property manager’s certificate, when selling an apartment”, Anu Kärkkäinen says.

The period of notice for a company meeting also increases from one to two weeks.

“Tenants of rented apartments can participate in company meetings without voting rights, if regulations or future repairs are on the agenda. The intention of the Act is that those in rented accommodation are informed of future works well in advance.”

Another new point is that the company is responsible for underfloor heating it has installed in an apartment. Previously it was responsible only for hydronic underfloor heating systems. Moreover, expenses for a retrospectively installed lift are no longer divided between shareholders according to apartment size, but now the residents of upper floors pay more.

The new Housing Company Act

A shareholder must submit to the housing company a written notification of many alteration or repair works in the apartment, which previously only required a verbal notification. For more details: www.taloyhtio.net/lakitieto/uusiasuntoosakeyhtiolaki/huoneistoremontit.

The housing company must present a statement of repair requirements for the next five years, and of major repairs carried out in previous years, at the company meeting.



Steam-cleaning clothes

The TTS research, development and education institute (TTS-Työteho-seura) tested two washing machines on the market promoting the effectiveness of steam for cleaning and freshening clothes.

There are currently two washing machines on the market using steam. The LG F1480QDS washing machine has, in addition to the usual wash programmes, an optional steam function, which promises to deep-clean the laundry and destroy mites and bacteria at the same time. The machine's quick-fresh programme claims to freshen creased clothes in 20 minutes using steam.

The steam programmes of the Electrolux EWF 167580 washing machine are intended only for steaming dry garments, to reduce creases and odours.

What was tested?

TTS's specialist Anneli Reisbacka tested the steam programmes of the Electrolux washing machine on dry cotton and polyester shirts. When treating one shirt, the residual moisture was about 6%, i.e.

fairly damp; when treating six shirts at a time, it was a suitably damp 2–3%. The steam-fresh programme of the LG washing machine left the shirts 5–6% damp. After the steam treatment, the clothes need to be hung up on hangers and ironed, if necessary.

As well as using the freshening programmes, the institute washed 4 kg of dirty cotton laundry on the LG wash programmes, with steam-cleaning as an additional function.

Added value of steam

Anneli Reisbacka was not convinced by the steam-freshening functions of the washing machines. She notes that a similar result is achieved by selecting a tumble dryer programme which leaves the laundry iron-dry.

In the LG machine, the use of steam in the wash is incorporated into selected programmes. It is difficult to estimate how much of the wash result is due to steam and how much to the high temperature.

TTS also plans to research the effectiveness of steam in cleaning difficult stains.



Helsingin Energia No. 1

The recent EPSI Rating Customer Satisfaction 2010 survey confirms that Helsingin Energia customers are the most satisfied with their electricity company. Helen snatched the top position, as it did last year, in both private and business customer sections.

The survey shows that private customers' satisfaction has significantly increased across the whole industry, but business customers' satisfaction has declined considerably.

According to the EPSI Rating survey, the most important factors influencing customer satisfaction are image, expectations, technical quality, quality of service, price-quality ratio and loyalty.

The survey reveals that 77 per cent of electricity customers consider price the most important factor in the choice of power company. During the first two-thirds of 2010, five per cent of customers have changed their electricity supplier.

The study also investigated how many customers gave their company 'a clean bill of health' and had not made any complaints during the current year. Helsingin Energia came out best, as only two per cent of its customers had made a complaint.

The EPSI Rating, or Extended Performance Satisfaction Index, is a EU Commission initiative, the purpose of which is to collect and analyse information about private persons' and business representatives' opinions regarding the quality of products and services in different countries.

Data for analysis was collected by telephone interviews 1–29 November 2010. The interviewees were asked for their assessment of the electricity company they were using. About 2,000 persons and business representatives were interviewed in Finland.

Remote reading expands to the suburbs

Meter replacements in the Helsinki suburbs will start next summer. The meters will be replaced first in single-family houses and other detached sites. In these sites, the installation contractor will agree on the time of meter replacement with the customer. Meter replacements in blocks of flats and terraced houses will begin at the end of 2011.

Currently, approx. 150,000 customers of Helen Sähköverkko Oy have remotely read meters. All of the electricity meters in the distribution area of Helen Sähköverkko will be replaced with remotely read meters by 2013.

When the customer moves house, electricity is connected according to the contract. Remotely read meters enable a new operating model in connections and disconnections of electricity related to the start and end of electricity contracts. The new remotely read meters have a

switching device that can be used for remotely switching the electricity on or off at the site. In the course of the spring, electricity at the remotely connected sites will be connected and disconnected automatically according to the periods of validity of the electricity contracts.

The new operating model does not require any special measures from the customers. The only thing to remember is to notify the start and end dates of contracts in good time before moving house. The current advance notice period of two weeks related to moving house is sufficient. If the notice is late or you have forgotten to send it, the electricity supply to the site may have been disconnected when you move in. If that happens, you can call Helsingin Energia's customer service to have the supply of electricity reconnected.

Further information www.helen.fi

Pick up and keep!

Pick up the leaflet *Kodin energiavinkit* [Saving energy at home] from the Energy Advisory Centre. You can also find the leaflet on the internet at www.helen.fi/energia/energiansaasto.html.

The leaflet is divided into three main topics: electrical safety, sensible use of energy, and sorting and recycling.

The leaflet is available in Finnish and in Swedish. An English version is also on the way.





Borrow a meter

Reveal your home's energy glutton, source of heat loss, or wall struts if you want to hang up a picture. You can borrow a meter free of charge from the Energy Advisory Centre.

You can borrow a consumption meter, surface temperature meter, moisture meter, wall scanner, radon meter, light intensity meter, and decibel meter from the Energy Advisory Centre.

A consumption meter measures the electricity consumption of plug-in appliances. A surface temperature meter measures the temperatures of surfaces, structures and heating appliances. A moisture meter reveals the location of moisture damage in the bathroom. A wall scanner reveals struts, water pipes or iron mountings. A radon meter indicates the radon levels in a room. A light intensity meter helps to determine home lighting levels, and a decibel meter measures the level of noise.

The meters are easy to use, and the experts at the Energy Advisory Centre will give guidance in their use. The meters always come with instructions for use in Finnish, Swedish and English.

Reserve a meter at www.helen.fi, or by telephone 09 617 2727. The meter can be picked up at the Energy Advisory Centre, Kampinkuja 2, 3rd floor.

A consumption meter can also be borrowed from libraries in Helsinki. At present, 20 libraries each have two meters for lending. Check at www.helen.fi for your nearest library.



Energy gluttons exposed

A panel of Helsingin Energia customers tested a consumption meter. Many panel members were concerned about rising electricity bills.

HEIKKI KUITTINEN from Helsinki wanted to find out the reason for his high electricity bill and utilised a consumption meter to measure his home electrical appliances.



What did the measurement reveal?

The energy glutton turned out to be the 15-year-old fridge-freezer. It uses three times the amount of electricity compared with reference values. The fridge-freezer will be replaced.

A Helsinki schoolgirl, **TEA SARAJUURI**, investigated the electricity consumption in her home as part of an eco-themed geography project. She measured the consumption of a television, a game console and a computer, in use and standby mode. The consumption meter was a useful tool for this school project.

What kind of a project was it?

"The idea of the study was to measure the consumption levels during the first week and to try to use less in the second week. While our family's detached house used 179 kWh of electricity during the first week, in the saving week the consumption was 159 kWh. The annual saving would be 1,040 kWh or about EUR 170. The consumption meter helped to establish that our appliances use a normal amount of electricity."



What did you do differently during the saving week?

"We always switched off all lights when leaving a room, and did not have a sauna at all. I also got Dad always to switch off the power to the computer after use."

The complete interviews in Finnish are on the Helen website at www.helen.fi/hyvapalvelu. Also read how **Tage Stenman**, **Marika Hynynen**, **Joni Oksa** and **Harri Honkanen** benefited from consumption metering.

You can also comment on user experiences and relate your own experiences on the web page.

AT YOUR SERVICE Service numbers and price info

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Sähkötalo, Kampinkuja 2,
FI-00090 Helen
www.helen.fi

Customer service, 3rd floor
Mon-Fri 8.30-16
Telephone service Mon-Fri 8-18
Domestic customers 010 802 802
Business customers 010 802 803
Electricity meter readings 010 802 804

Fault reports
Breakdowns in electricity supply
08001 80808

Breakdowns in district heating supply 08001 60602
Faults in outdoor lighting 08001 73173
Telephone calls received by Helsinki Energy customer service are recorded.
Call charges for numbers beginning with 010:
• from landlines: 8.28 c/call + 5.95 c/min.
• from mobile phones, all operators: 8.28 c/call + 17.04 c/min.
The prices include VAT at 23%.
Our free e-services are available on our website: www.helen.fi

Advisory services
Energy Advisory Centre 09 617 2726

Advice on how to choose and use domestic appliances. You can also borrow energy, moisture, structural, surface temperature and light meters from us:
energiakeskus@helen.fi
Advice on electricity use and energy saving
09 617 4010

District heating
New connections to district heat
09 617 2961
Advisory service on heat use
09 617 2969
Billing and consumption enquiries
09 617 2856

HELSINGIN ENERGIN ENERGIÄ'S AND HELEN SÄHKÖVERKKO OY'S ONLINE MAGAZINE

Published by:
Helsingin Energia
Kampinkuja 2, Helsinki
FI-00090 HELEN
tel. 09 6171
fax 09 617 2360
www.helen.fi
Editor-in-chief: Seija Uusitalo