

Zesa to distribute free prepaid electricity meters in Bulawayo and Harare

by Staff reporter

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ZESA HOLDINGS will next week start distributing prepaid electricity meters to households in Harare and Bulawayo free of charge under an initiative expected to improve its billing system and power supply.

The first phase of the programme targets over 600 000 households while commercial customers are expected to cater for their own switchover.

Government has since awarded a \$500 000 tender to a local company that will provide a wireless platform from which the system will function.

Energy and Power Development Minister Mr Elton Mangoma yesterday said Government engaged a service provider with the capacity to service the entire country.

He said the initiative would cover other cities once work in Harare and Bulawayo is complete.

"We have carried out the adjudication process through the tender board and they will be announcing the winner of that tender soon," he said.

"The tender has since been awarded; we are only awaiting the service provider to begin work on the ground within the next two weeks.

"We looked for a service provider who has the capacity to handle different types of third party meter brands.

"Zesa Holdings will handle the switchover of households while commercial players will be asked to handle their own change-over.

"Our plan is to complete the programme in as little time as possible."

Under the new system, customers will purchase electricity units that will then be fed into their respective meters.

One will only enjoy power supplies while the units last.

The system is vastly different from the present one where Zesa Holdings bills customers for a month's consumption.

In recent months, this has caused problems with consumers complaining of the bills, some of which are estimates and hardly reflect actual consumption.

The power utility, on the other hand, has struggled to collect revenue.

It is understood only 82 percent of customers pay monthly, a situation that has seen Zesa Holdings being owed more than \$449 million.

Minister Mangoma said the new system would enable the parastatal to raise funds for electricity generation.

Zesa chief executive Engineer Josh Chifamba weighed in, saying his organisation would recover debts from defaulters.

"When you pay for your electricity under the pre-paid system, part of what you pay will go into liquidating what you owe us," he said.