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L HIKES BOOST RETURN

BY GRAHAM HISCOTT
DEPUTY BUSINESS EDITOR
graham.hiscott@mirror.co.uk

firm Npower more than profits after jacking up bills

erman-owned giant banked n in the first six months of the te customers slashing their

will pile n Npower copy the f rivals, e announced e rises. h Power by up to a lier this itish Gas, Scottish & t Energy nishing hikes few weeks. e - leaving many paying more than year for gas and - follows a wave of bill ast winter.

raised bills by 5% in January ether with higher prices from its ower stations and bagging a major supply steel giant Tata, helped profits. That offset a 2% drop in

household and small business electricity consumption, and a 24% slump in gas use, as a result of milder weather and homes being better insulated.

Npower was keeping tight-lipped on further price rises but predicted profits would grow "substantially" in the second half of the year despite soaring costs.

Owner RWE's profits crashed by a third to £2.9 billion because of Germany's decision

to phase out nuclear power and impose higher taxes.

Npower justified its bumper profits, claiming it has spent £3bn over three years on major projects such as power plants.

Audrey Gallacher, director of energy at the watchdog Consumer Focus, said: "Npower and EDF are the only two of the major suppliers yet to announce price increases and both have reported healthy profits.

"If they announce similar double-digit price rises to other firms, their customers are likely to struggle to understand how that is warranted."

British Gas's profits halved to £270m in the first half of the year but parent company Centrica still raked-in £1.3bn.

German-owned rival E.ON announces its results today.



'If they make double-digit rises, customers will struggle to understand'

▼ ROSY Caprice says sales are increasing for her lingerie



CAPRICE'S VITAL STATS IN SHAPE

MODEL Caprice says sales of her lingerie and swimwear range are taking off. Her company, By Caprice Lingerie, saw turnover increase 48% to £3million in the year to June. The American, who turns 40 later this year, signed deals with Next and 15 independent stockists last month. Debenhams, Littlewoods and internet fashion giant ASOS already stocked the By Caprice label, which starts at £35 for a matching bra and pants set. "I spend a lot of time to make sure the designs fit properly," she told Your Money, "and I never wear anything else myself."