



VOLUME 27 | ISSUE #11  
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# CUSTOMER UPDATE



## FEATURING: MN BUFFER LAW

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[WWW.OWATONNAUTILITIES.COM](http://WWW.OWATONNAUTILITIES.COM)

# OPU MEMO



Jared Hendricks,  
Energy Conservation &  
Key Accounts Officer

## OPU Commission

Mr. Kim Cosens  
Mr. Dale E. Simon  
Mr. Matt Kottke  
Mr. Kent Rossi  
Mr. Randy Doyal

As we continue to focus on the customer's experience, we have made a few changes in 2017. In January, we rolled out the redesigned Customer Update and now are proud to announce our redesigned website.

OPU's website was first published in 1998 while the internet was still relatively new. With only 25% of households having access to internet at the time, websites were mostly informational only with little to no interaction between the company and customer via internet. Since then, many upgrades have happened to our website. It was redesigned in 2004, then another redesign in 2011 giving customers the ability to pay their bills online.

Our newest version of the website has been running for a little over a month, having gone live on October 3, 2017. From feedback we have received from customers, we learned paying your bill and looking for outage information are two of the most common reasons to visit our website. Other common reasons for visiting our website include applying for service, getting construction forms, and looking for employment information. From this feedback, the landing page focuses on these five different items.

If you haven't paid your bill online, now is a great time to register as a new user. Before you get started, you will need to have a copy of your bill. Click on the Pay Bill button, then Register New User on the next page. It will walk you through getting registered and signing in. Once you sign in, not only can you pay your bill, but you can view copies of your recent bills as well.

Another payment option available on our website is the ability to sign up for automatic payments from your bank account, Visa, or MasterCard without having to come into our office. Go to our Billing & Customer Service, then Payments page to fill out the secure online authorization form all without having to stop into the office.

Outages is the next button you will see on the new website. Clicking here will bring you to a map created from our GIS system that can be updated to show large power outages. This is a major step for OPU as we work to increase our communication with the city about outages. Updates to the map may have some delays, but it will help you to determine if we know about your power outage or if you still need to call us to report it.

Large power outage information is also being posted on our Facebook site. The redesigned website includes a social media hub at the bottom of the page, making it a one-stop shop for information. You will see our planned water outages, peak alert notifications, as well as educational messages being posted to our social media sites and can view them all from our new website. Having this hub is a great way for customers to stay informed but don't forget to Like our Facebook page still.

With the new features on our website designed to help the customers' experience, we also made sure you have a user-friendly mobile web experience. Opening up our website on your cell phone will still give you access to the information and features at your fingertips wherever you find yourself on our site.

Check it out, let us know what you think!

## CONSERVATION TIP\$

Save money on your utility bill this holiday season by putting a timer on your holiday lights and decorations. Set your timer to turn on when it gets dark and turn off when you go to bed. For your outdoor decorations, look for timers that include a light sensor for easier operation!

Go to [www.tinyurl.com/OPU-Tips](http://www.tinyurl.com/OPU-Tips) for more conservation tips.



### Winter is here!

In preparation, the Owatonna Police Department will place "Notification" flyers on all vehicles parked on the street from November 8 - 14, one week before the ordinance goes into effect. In addition, officers will place "Warning" flyers on vehicles from November 15 - 21 that are in violation of the ordinance the first week of the enforcement period. This approach is intended to be educational and bring awareness to the winter parking ordinance and to reduce costly vehicle impound fees. Starting November 22, officers will issue citations to violators, regardless if snow is present. To view the ordinance, visit [www.ci.owatonna.mn.us](http://www.ci.owatonna.mn.us) and select: City Codes, Section 72.02 Parking during Street Maintenance and Snow Emergency. The ordinance reads:

### 72.02 PARKING DURING STREET MAINTENANCE OR SNOW EMERGENCY.

(A) (1) No person shall park or leave standing any vehicle on any street in the city on any day between the hours of 12:01 a.m. and 12:00 noon from November 15 through March 31, except as hereinafter provided:

(a) On even-numbered calendar dates, vehicles may be parked on the near side of the street adjacent to lots and houses which have been assigned even numbers; and

(b) On odd-numbered calendar dates, vehicles may be parked on the near side of the street adjacent to lots and houses which have been assigned odd numbers.

(2) This division (A) does not apply to any street where parking is limited to one side, to any cul-de-sac which has combined even and odd house numbers, nor to any street which has more restrictive parking requirements.

(3) This division (A) does not apply to street parking within a two-block radius of duly constituted churches for regularly scheduled weekend services, holiday services, funerals and weddings. Street parking is allowed one hour prior and one hour after the scheduled service times.

(B) Signs announcing the existence of the winter parking ordinance and the hotline telephone number shall be placed at all entrances to the city.

(C) No vehicle shall be parked or be permitted to remain on any street in or serving the Business District, as defined in § 71.065 of this code of ordinances, between the hours of 2:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. on any day, contrary to the signs ordered by the Council to be posted on such streets. Signs in place effective upon the adoption of this chapter shall be in effect until ordered changed.

(D) Any violation of this section shall be subject to the penalties set forth in § 71.999 of this chapter.

(1992 Code, § 700:05) (Ord. 1098, passed 11-1-1994; Ord. 1128, passed 10-3-1995; Ord. 1192, passed 10-20-1998; Ord. 1408, passed 2-20-2007; Ord. 1416, passed 5-1-2007) Penalty, see § 72.99

### Streets exempt from winter parking ordinance:

- All cul-de-sacs (any street with the word "PLACE" in its name). \*Any "DRIVE" or "LANE" where the house numbers change from even to odd on the same side of the street. Exempt Streets: Arglen Drive NW, Autumn Drive SE, Cardinal Drive SE, Colonial Manor Streets, Greenhaven Lane NE, Greenwood Drive NE, Linn Drive SW, Morning Drive SE, Oakwood Lane NE, Richway Lane SE, Willow Creek Drive NE
- Any street where parking is limited to one side.
- Any street that has other more restrictive parking requirements.

The Owatonna Police Department would like to thank everyone for taking the time to adhere to this ordinance. The general intent of this ordinance is to assist city street maintenance crews and enhance operations to ensure efficient and effective snow removal that benefits all of us. The Owatonna Police Department wants to wish everyone a safe and joyous holiday season, and travel with care! For more information, please call the Owatonna Police Department at 507-774-7200.

### OWATONNA POLICE DEPARTMENT RESERVE UNIT

The Owatonna Police Department has an open application process and is currently recruiting Owatonna citizens for the volunteer police reserve unit. The police reserve unit is an opportunity for service-minded individuals to represent and serve their community in a unique and honorable way.

For more information see our website at <http://www.ci.owatonna.mn.us/police/reserve-officer-program> or please contact Captain Rethemeier at 507-774-7203.

### MAYOR

Tom Kuntz

### COUNCIL MEMBERS

David Burbank

Nathan Dotson

Jeff Okerberg

Kevin Raney

Greg Schultz

Brent Svenby

Doug Voss



# MN BUFFER LAW

*Information for this article obtained from Minnesota.gov. Image from MN Board of Water and Soil Resources.*

Minnesota's buffer law establishes new perennial vegetation buffers of 50 feet along public lakes, rivers, and streams and buffers of 16.5 feet along public ditches. These buffers will help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment. The deadline for implementation for buffers on public waters was November 1, 2017. The deadline for public ditches is November 1, 2018. The law provides flexibility for landowners to install alternative practices with equivalent water quality benefits that are based on the Natural Resources Conservation Service Field Office Technical Guide.

The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) reports that statewide 89% of parcels adjacent to Minnesota waters meet preliminary compliance with the law. Soil Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) are reporting encouraging progress in their work with landowners around the state. Visit [Minnesota.gov](http://Minnesota.gov) or [www.dnr.state.mn.us/buffers/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/buffers/index.html) for the buffer maps for a visual representation of the Minnesota Buffer Law.

## **What is a Buffer?**

A buffer, also known as a riparian filter strip, is vegetated land adjacent to a stream, river, lake, wetland or ditch. Buffers help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment, and are an important conservation practice for helping keep water clean. Studies by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency show that buffers are critical to protecting and restoring water quality and healthy aquatic life, natural stream functions and aquatic habitat due to their immediate proximity to the water.

## **What can be planted in a Buffer?**

A wide range of vegetation can make a suitable buffer; to meet requirements the plants must be perennials. This includes hay and forage crops such as alfalfa and

clover; woody vegetation; perennial grains that can be harvested later; and prairie vegetation. Farmers buying seed from a Minnesota company to plant buffers on their property can be assured the seed is free of 11 weed species considered "prohibited" in the state. These weeds include Palmer amaranth, leafy spurge, bindweed and several thistle species. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture works with County Ag Inspectors to sample and test thousands of seed mixtures sold in the state each year, ensuring the mixes are free of these prohibited weeds and meet Minnesota's standards for quality. Farmers should purchase seed from a reputable company that holds a seed permit from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to be sure this testing has taken place.

## **Why Does OPU Care?**

While buffers directly protect surface water, they also serve an important protection for groundwater sources. Surface water naturally filters as it moves into groundwater sources. It may not filter effectively if concentrations of pollutants are too high. There are places at risk of allowing surface water to move too quickly into aquifers without having the proper amount of time to filter out pollutants. Keeping groundwater sources (including the aquifers OPU pumps water from) is important in order to provide clean, safe, healthy drinking water to Owatonna.

Please contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) office for more information about buffers and local requirements.

# EQUIPMENT SERIES



During the fall, you may see an OPU worker walking in back of a small truck, maneuvering it down an alley using a handheld controller.

It's not a scene from the new "Transformers" movie. It's OPU trying to respect your property by using a mini bucket truck. The truck can fit through gates with openings as narrow as 36 inches.

Sometimes OPU has to perform work on a power line that runs through an alley or over a customer's property. The mini bucket trucks help us work safely and effectively, without damaging a customer's property.

Our mini bucket truck, which is about one-tenth the size of a regular utility bucket truck, uses tracks instead of tires to minimize damage to lawns. Mini bucket trucks last about 10 years and cost between \$120,000 and \$150,000 — about half the cost of a full-sized utility bucket truck. We've been using mini bucket trucks for over 10 years.

Providing customers with reliable electric service sometimes means accessing parts of our electric system that lie in tight or hard-to-reach places.

We don't have a name for our mini bucket truck. If you'd like to suggest a name, send it to us at [customerservice@owatonnautilities.com](mailto:customerservice@owatonnautilities.com).

## HOLIDAY LIGHTS

DON'T THROW AWAY OLD HOLIDAY LIGHTS.

**RECYCLE THEM!**

Once you've purchased all the new energy efficient LED holiday lights you need this season (and applied for your rebate from Owatonna Public Utilities; see our website), what should you do with the old ones?

**Owatonna Public Utilities will recycle all of your old holiday light strands for FREE!**

It's easy – just bring your old strands of lights into the Owatonna Public Utilities lobby and drop them in the bins designated for holiday light recycling.

Available now through January 31, 2018.



## OPU HIGHLIGHT



**Dale Simon,**  
**OPU Commissioner**

Dale Simon has been an OPU Commissioner since May 2010 and is currently serving as the President.

Dale enjoys being a part of the Commission and the responsibility that is asked of him. He likes being an advocate for the customer--not just for the current customers--but also for those of the next generations.

Dale recounted that the 2010 flood had potential to be a real setback for OPU, but felt that because of good management it became an opportunity, as well. He felt the opportunity to go beyond just restoring what we had, and asking what we needed in the years to come.

Dale is originally from Merrill, Wisconsin and went to college at UW Madison. He and his wife, Michelle, moved to Owatonna in 2008. They have three children ranging in age between 8th grade and a junior in college.

Dale is a member of both the Owatonna Country Club and the Owatonna Curling Club. He got into curling when a good friend invited him to watch and has been enjoying it since. He has also spent time coaching basketball and is on the Owatonna Basketball Association Board.

Thank you, Dale, for being a member of our team!

# CARBON MONOXIDE

Getting to know your carbon monoxide (CO) detector can mean the difference between knowing when to replace your batteries, when to replace your detector, or when to get out of your house.

Your CO detector will start beeping when its batteries are low and require replacing. This alarm is different than the alarm that sounds when it detects dangerous levels of CO. It is recommended that you replace the CO detector battery once a year, or more frequently if the low battery alarm sounds.

New CO detectors also have an end of life alarm. Although many manufactures already included it, the law required it starting in 2009. This alarm will be different than the low battery alarm and will not go away with fresh batteries. Most CO detectors have a 10-year life and should be replaced at this time.

Each CO detector's alerts may be slightly different. Please take a minute to learn what your CO detector's alarms mean. According to the manufacturer Kidde, the alarms your detector uses are commonly printed on the back of your detector. Getting to know these alerts will help you to identify when the alarm is actually detecting CO in your home or business. Remember, if anyone is showing signs and symptoms of CO poisoning including drowsiness, headache, or nausea, get out and call Owatonna Public Utilities!



## 2018 Stormwater Utility Fee Changes

Beginning January 1st, 2018 you will notice a change in your Stormwater Utility Fee. As a result of the 2015 rate structure study conducted by Foth Infrastructure and Environment, LLC the stormwater utility fee is set to gradually increase on an annual basis through 2019 in order to provide an equitable, stable and fair funding source for all stormwater management activities.

The rate for a single-family residential property is a constant monthly fee of \$3.87 (starting 2018). All other properties are based on the following equation that evaluates the equivalent residential unit, acreage, and land use:

$$FEE = (\text{Parcel Acreage}/0.33) \times \text{Intensity Factor} \times \text{Current ERU}$$

Year	ERU
2017	\$3.40
2018	\$3.87
2019	\$4.34

If the property is multi-family, townhomes, and or mobile homes with individual meters, it will be billed at 80% of the current ERU per unit.

For more information regarding the Stormwater Utility Fee please contact the Public Works Department at 507-444-4350.

# Celebrate with Savings!

## BUY ENERGY EFFICIENT HOLIDAY LIGHTS OR DECORATIONS & APPLY FOR A REBATE:

1. Purchase new LED holiday plug-in (not battery operated) lights and decorations in 2017.
2. Complete this page and submit it to your utility:
  - by March 31, 2018
  - with original sales receipt
  - with LED packaging showing the LED logo and number of lights per string.
3. Rebate is limited to 50% of LED string or package cost, tax excluded.

Customer Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone # (with area code) \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone # (with area code) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip + 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Installation Address (if different from above) \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip + 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Account # \_\_\_\_\_

Residential  Commercial

A Lamp Size	B # of Lamps per String	C # of Strings	D Cost per String	E Rebate per String (D X .50) up to max amounts*	F Total Rebate (C X E)
<input type="checkbox"/> Mini <input type="checkbox"/> Other			\$	\$	\$
<input type="checkbox"/> Mini <input type="checkbox"/> Other			\$	\$	\$
<input type="checkbox"/> Mini <input type="checkbox"/> Other			\$	\$	\$
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<input type="checkbox"/> Mini <input type="checkbox"/> Other			\$	\$	\$
<input type="checkbox"/> Mini <input type="checkbox"/> Other			\$	\$	\$

\* Rebate is 50% of string or package cost (tax excluded), up to maximum amounts listed below:

# of Lamps	Maximum Rebate per String
less than 99	\$3.00
100 - 199	\$6.00
200 - 299	\$9.00
300 or more	\$12.00

OFFICE USE ONLY: ID# \_\_\_\_\_  
 DATE Received \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date Processed \_\_\_\_\_

GRAND TOTAL REBATE: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*(Rebates under \$75 will be applied to your account.)*

**TEAMING UP TO SAVE YOU MONEY**



**CONSERVE & SAVE®**

**Austin Utilities**  
 Attn: Rebate Processing  
 1908 14th St NE  
 Austin, MN 55912  
 507.433.8886  
 www.austinutilities.com

**Owatonna Public Utilities**  
 Attn: Rebate Processing  
 P.O. Box 800  
 Owatonna, MN 55060  
 507.451.2480  
 www.owatonnautilities.com

**Rochester Public Utilities**  
 Attn: Rebate Processing  
 4000 E River Rd NE  
 Rochester, MN 55906-2813  
 507.280.1500  
 www.rpu.org

Recipient must be an electric customer of Austin Utilities, Owatonna Public Utilities, or Rochester Public Utilities. Valid only on purchases made in 2017. All Electric Efficiency Rebate terms and conditions apply.

1017

P.O. Box 800 208 S. Walnut Ave.  
Owatonna, MN 55060

Office: 451-2480 Service: 451-1616

**OFFICE HOURS:**  
**Monday-Wednesday:**  
8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

**Thursday:**  
8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

**Friday:**  
8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

**Saturday & Sunday:**  
Closed

## Payment Options

- Online at [www.owatonnautilities.com](http://www.owatonnautilities.com)
- Automatic Withdrawal; bank account or credit card
- Drive-up drop box located in the parking lot south of building
- Drop box locations at Cash Wise Grocery Store and HyVee Food Store
- Mail
- At Owatonna Public Utilities; cash, credit card, check or money order

## Moving?

Remember to contact the Customer Service Department **ONE WEEK** prior to moving, 451-2480.

## Congratulations!

Congratulations to Aidan Ebner, the winner of OPU's \$500 scholarship and entry into the Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarship contest sponsored by the Minnesota Municipal Power Agency. OPU received several entries for the contest with Aidan's coming out on top. The theme for this year's essay is "Municipal Utilities: Good for Us All".

Aidan concluded his essay by writing, "Municipal utilities are good for all of us because of the far deeper impact they have on their communities and citizens. They bring a city or town together and show what it means to give back and put forward into a community to make it a better place..."

Aidan is attending the University of Wisconsin, LaCrosse this fall and plans to use the scholarship money for his education costs.

Again, congratulations Aidan! Best wishes with your future and thank you for taking an interest in municipal utilities.



Your opinion matters to us. Please take a few minutes to tell us how we did by visiting our website at [owatonnautilities.com/customerurvey](http://owatonnautilities.com/customerurvey) or simply scan the QR code above.

## From the Editors

We welcome your comments and suggestions for future issues. Feel free to give us a call at 451-2480 or send an email to [schmolt@owatonnautilities.com](mailto:schmolt@owatonnautilities.com).

## Gas Leak?

If you smell gas and can't find the source immediately, go to a neighbor's house and call OPU at 451-1616.



Don't turn electrical switches on or off or use a flashlight or telephone in the home, because an electrical spark could ignite the gas and cause an explosion.

