



VOLUME 27 | ISSUE #10  
OCTOBER 2017

# CUSTOMER UPDATE



## FEATURING: MUTUAL AID

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

# OPU MEMO



Mark Fritsch,  
General Manager

## OPU Commission

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

### **Benefits of Public Power**

In October, we will be celebrating public power week. It is an opportunity for us to thank our customers and highlight the benefits of public power. Our web page "Benefits of Public Power" does a good job listing many of the key benefits. I will take this time to add a little more detail to some of those.

**Keeping Dollars in the Community** - Local ownership means that customers' utility dollars stay in the community — creating jobs and supporting the local economy.

Municipal utilities serve as an engine for economic development. Local flexibility and quality service offered by municipal utilities are a major advantage for the community in attracting and retaining commercial and industrial customers.

Municipal utilities make significant payments-in-lieu-of-taxes to the city. These payments are similar, and often much greater to the tax payments that would be made by a private utility. Each year, OPU contributes more than \$1.3 million dollars to the City of Owatonna by providing free utilities to the City in-lieu-of-taxes.

On average, municipal utility rates are competitive with those of other utilities. Competitive rates means our customers have more dollars available to spend on other goods and services, which boosts the local economy. OPU's rates have played a key role in attracting and retaining customers and businesses.

**Local Control and Regulation** - The rates and services of OPU are governed by itself, through a commission that is selected by the Mayor and affirmed by the city council. This is the most responsive and accessible form of regulation. The utility is governed by residents of the community who are customers of the utility and are thoroughly familiar with its operations and services. If a customer has a complaint, he or she does not have to take it

to a faceless agency in Minnesota. The customer can discuss the problem locally, with another member of the community, and be assured that the problem will be addressed.

**The Public Interest** - A municipal utility is operated in the public interest, for the benefit of the residents of the city — not for the benefit of stockholders who live miles away and may have little interest in the community. In private utility ownership, there is a tension between the interests of the customers and the interests of the stockholders — their interests are not always the same, and they may be in conflict. This disparity of interests has given rise to a complex system of regulation of private utilities. This extensive level of regulation is unnecessary when the utility is publicly owned and operated for the benefit of the community it serves.

**Community Values** - Decisions about the operation of a municipal utility are made locally, by members of the community, at open, public meetings. Because all decisions are made locally, a municipal utility is uniquely able to respond to the community's needs, build on the community's strengths, and reflect and advance the community's values.

**City Partnership** - Our city-utility partnerships are a win-win strategy for everyone involved. Several of these include our participation in the Steele County Safety Camp, where we participate with volunteers and provide an electrical safety demonstrating. You will also see crews hanging holiday lights and banners that bring a festive atmosphere to our community.

Coordinating and collaborating with the city on road and other construction work brings a significant benefit to both of us. We work with the city to plan joint projects on roads so natural gas piping and water mains are replaced at the same time roads are resurfaced. We both save costs and minimize disruptions by only affecting a road just once.

As always, it is an honor and a privilege to serve you.

## CONSERVATION TIP\$

Did you know your computer is using electricity while you are sleeping? Computers use electricity any time they are turned on, even if they are in sleep or hibernate mode! Turning your computer off and unplugging any laptops while you aren't using them will help save energy in your home.

Visit [www.tinyurl.com/OPU-Tips](http://www.tinyurl.com/OPU-Tips) for more energy savings tips from OPU.



#### Good Neighbors Make Great Neighborhoods

What makes Owatonna special is that the majority of our residents take pride in their home and their neighborhood. They watch out for each other and care about the safety and the appearance of their neighborhood. Taking the time to establish good terms with your neighbors has numerous benefits. The community is friendlier, the neighborhood safer, and our town is a nicer and more comfortable place to live. Unfortunately, there are also a handful of residents that do not maintain their property to the same level as their neighbors. To address many of the problems associated with this type neighbor, the City of Owatonna City Council established codes and ordinances to make sure that all properties are safe and maintained.

Here are some of the ordinances that you should be aware of so you can be a good neighbor:

#### Mow your lawn regularly and keep your flowers, trees and bushes trimmed appropriately<sup>i</sup>

- Any growth of grasses, rank vegetation or weeds whether defined as noxious weeds or not must be maintained to a height no greater than 8 inches upon any occupied lot including any boulevard area.
- Upon any other lot or land no greater than 18 inches.

#### Do your part to control noxious weeds<sup>ii</sup>

- Keep your yard and garden tidy. Weed regularly because the presence of weeds in your yard is not only unsightly but can also spread to your neighbor's yard. Once weeds take root, they are difficult to get rid of because the seeds can survive for long periods in the ground and usually become a recurring problem.
- Additional information about noxious weeds can be found at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture website and the Minnesota Department of Transportation website.

#### Don't let your garbage pile up<sup>iii</sup>

- Waste, refuse, trash or debris needs to be kept in an enclosed building or properly contained in closed containers. Containers shall be metal or plastic, reusable, covered, leak-proof and designed for such use.
- Containers shall be located in the side or rear yard. For residential uses other than single-family dwellings, containers in side yards must be located within an opaque fenced area. Containers shall not be set on city boulevards for pickup; except that, containers/dumpsters may be set on city street or city right-of-way with City Engineer's written permission and for periods not to exceed seven days, and city approved uniform residential recycling containers containing household recyclable materials may be placed within the boulevard on designated pickup days only, as may be designated by the City Council from time to time.
- No refuse, garbage, trash or debris, except household recyclable materials, will be allowed to accumulate or be stored for more than 14 days. Construction material must be removed from the job site within 30 days of completion of project. Construction material not being used on site

cannot be stored in residential areas.

#### Follow the rules for recreational fires<sup>iv</sup>

- Be a good neighbor and position your fire where the smoke will least likely blow onto your neighbor's property.
- Recreational fires may be held without any permit, providing the following requirements and prohibitions are followed:
  - Fires may be no larger than 3 feet in diameter and 3 feet in height, and contained within a pit or device designed for such use. Fires must be at least 25 feet away from all buildings or combustible materials. Fires must not be allowed to smolder. Fires must be attended at all times. A fire extinguisher, shovel, garden hose or a pail of water must be readily available for extinguishing the fire. Only unpainted and untreated wood, coal, or charcoal may be burned.

#### Don't store junked vehicles on your property<sup>v</sup>

- It is considered to be a public nuisance for any person to store or keep wrecked, junked or abandoned vehicles on private property if it is an unlicensed or incapacitated. Any vehicle stored on a property must have a valid and current license plate. It is also a public nuisance if there is a mechanical deficiency and the vehicle is incapable of movement under its own power and is parked or stored outside for a period in excess of ten days.

Above all, communicate with your neighbor on a regular basis and keep them in the loop. Remember the golden rule and if anything you are planning to do may affect them, minimize it and let them know in advance. Keep the channels of communication open by reminding them that if you're doing anything which disturbs them, they should feel comfortable approaching you about it. Being on bad terms with your neighbor can make your life frustrating, day after day. If there are problems with your neighbor's property, talk to them about it and give them an opportunity to correct the problem. Most people want to be good neighbors and are willing to correct problems promptly. If they do not correct the problem, you can contact the City of Owatonna to assist with resolving the issue.

i City of Owatonna Ordinance § 93.061

ii Minnesota Statute § 18.77 and 21.72

iii City of Owatonna Ordinance § 117.09

iv City of Owatonna Ordinance § 93.043

v City of Owatonna Ordinance § 93.021

#### MAYOR

Tom Kuntz

#### COUNCIL MEMBERS

David Burbank

Nathan Dotson

Jeff Okerberg

Kevin Raney

Greg Schultz

Brent Svenby

Doug Voss



# MUTUAL AID

*Information for this article obtained from Minnesota Municipal Power Agency.*

Minnesota municipal electric linemen, including OPU's own Matt Clements and Tony Hartle, who answered the 'mutual aid' call in the wake of Hurricane Irma have done exceptional work, by all accounts, and are back home.

Over the course of a week and a half the crews traveled halfway across the continent and took part in one of the largest power restoration efforts in U.S. history.

The 44 men, with a variety of equipment, left Rochester for Florida on Saturday, Sept. 9. After traveling and spending a day in Georgia riding out the storm's remains, the crews arrived in Kissimmee, Fla., on Sept. 12. At the height of Irma's destruction, 38,000, or 53 percent, of the Kissimmee Utility Authority's 72,000 customers lost power.

On Sept. 14, KUA reported that it completed power restoration to customers that were able to safely receive power. KUA crews were aided by mutual aid crews from Indiana, Minnesota, Texas and Wisconsin.

"We appreciate the patience of our customers and are grateful for our employees and mutual aid crews who worked tirelessly during our 75-hour restoration effort," said KUA president and general manager Jim Welsh.

While KUA crews left on the afternoon of Sept. 14 to assist the Orlando Utilities Commission, the Minnesota crews left central Florida and traveled 160 miles to Lake Worth, just south of West Palm Beach on the Atlantic coast.

In Lake Worth, the Minnesota crews worked tirelessly and continued to receive high praise.

MMUA Job Training and Safety Director Mike Willetts, Minnesota's point man on the effort, said, "I received one report saying, 'Can we request the Minnesota crews the next time we have a storm?' You guys are the best we have ever seen."

"That's just awesome," Willetts said. "There's no other word for it!"

Among the problems encountered were numerous portable generators. Safety, testing and grounding were key considerations on every worksite. In addition to the electrical hazards, the linemen also encountered a variety of wildlife, including alligators, snakes, killer bees and other local hazards.

## *The big picture*

As of Sept. 15, the Florida Municipal Electric Association (FMEA) reported that 141,000 public power utility customers remained without power--approximately 10 percent of the state's total municipal electric utility customers. More than 659,000 public power utility customers have had their power restored, FMEA noted, and many more were restored over last weekend.

Progress was slow in Key West, which did not have the resources or facilities to handle an influx of crews, but by this time Public Power was beginning to look at how it could best help other segments of the electric utility industry. Mutual aid efforts are also underway to assist the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority and the Virgin Island Water & Power Authority:

The Department of Energy reported Sept. 15 that there were 1.7 million outages in Florida, 93,000 out in Georgia, and 94,550 out in Puerto Rico.

Municipal utilities participating in the Irma-related mutual aid come from Alexandria, Anoka, Austin, Brainerd, Chaska, Elk River, Grand Rapids, Moorhead, Missouri River Energy Services, New Ulm, Owatonna, Redwood Falls, Rochester, St. James, Shakopee, Sleepy Eye, Marshall Municipal Utilities and MMUA.

# EQUIPMENT SERIES



OPU uses gas meters to measure the amount of natural gas a customer uses. A regulator is a separate device used to reduce the gas pressure from the street to a lower level before entering the residence. This allows the gas to be used safely by your appliances.

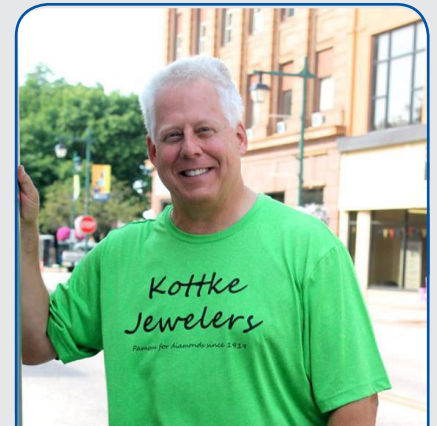
The regulator may stop working if it's impacted by snow, landscaping, dogs ties, or garden hoses. Each season brings its challenges, but there are ways you can help keep the regulator and meter

free of obstacles. Such as, when you're trimming your landscaping, be sure to take a look at the meter and regulator. Each time you shovel the driveway, take a broom to lightly sweep snow off.

A non-functioning regulator doesn't mean you're getting free gas. In fact, a malfunctioning regulator could shut off the gas causing your furnace, water heater or any other appliance to stop operating resulting in an unsafe gas level in your house which could lead to an explosion.

Gas meters aren't particularly expensive; residential ones cost about \$70. The meters last for 15-30 years, on average, and we replace about 225 meters each year. OPU has 10,446 gas meters in service; 9,890 residential and 556 commercial and industrial.

## OPU HIGHLIGHT



**Matt Kottke,**  
**OPU Commissioner**

Matt Kottke has been an OPU commissioner since May 2013. Matt worked for Truth Hardware for 31 years, working his way up from customer service to Marketing Manager. Following his career at Truth, he is now the 3rd generation to work at the family jewelry store downtown.

Volunteering and community involvement has been a big part of his family culture all the way back to when his grandfather started the business in 1919. Matt has been on the Park and Rec board, and is currently serving as a Trustee for the Owatonna Foundation and as board member with the Steele County Historical Society. Matt was also a past co-chair of the fundraising efforts to build the aquatic center and of the recent school bond referendum.

Matt enjoys being able to travel with his wife, Lisa, on many of her business trips. His favorite was when they went to Italy a few years ago. The architecture, land, and history all made the trip a beautiful experience.

Another hobby of Matt's is home brewing beer with a couple friends. His friend's daughter introduced the group to home brewing about 5 years ago and they have been brewing ever since as Mineral Springs Brewery.

Thank you, Matt, for being a member of our team

## HOUSE CALL WORKSHOP

### CONSERVE & \$AVE<sup>®</sup> HOUSE CALL FREE ENERGY WORKSHOP!



#### SAVING ENERGY 101

Learn common sense ways to decrease energy use and save money on utility bills. OPU customers can sign up for a comprehensive home energy audit (\$300 value) for a reduced co-pay of only \$25 (normally \$50).

**Thursday October 26**

**5:30-6:30pm**

OPU Morehouse  
Conference Room  
208 S Walnut Ave



The class is FREE but please pre-register through Owatonna Community Education:  
CALL: 507.444.7900 • ONLINE: [www.owatonnacommunityed.org](http://www.owatonnacommunityed.org) • CLASS CODE: 0514

# 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!



## Improving the Straight River with Neighborhood Best Management Practices

Stormwater falling on impervious surfaces such as roofs, driveways, sidewalks, and roads is prevented from naturally soaking into the ground and results in direct untreated runoff to nearby creeks and the river. This runoff has negative effects including increased flooding, decreased water clarity, stress on insects and fish, and impacts to our drinking water supply.

### 5 Easy and Effective Practices to Consider:

1. Rain Barrels – collect at downspout and use for watering plants or gardens (ask OPU about the Rain Barrel Rebate Program)
2. Disconnect Roof Gutters and Downspouts – disconnect downspouts and gutters from impervious surface and route through grassed areas
3. Rain Gardens – shallow depression planted with native flowers and plants that collects stormwater and infiltrates into the ground (ask the City about the Rain Garden Cost Share Program)
4. Tree Planter/Bioretenion Cell – tree planted in a special media that collects stormwater and promotes evapotranspiration and infiltration
5. Pervious Pavers- interlocking stones with void space that allows stormwater to flow through into a layer of rock, then into the soil below, replace traditional pavement

For more information, you may contact Brad Rademacher, Water Quality/ Stormwater Specialist at 507-774-7300 or [Bradley.rademacher@ci.owatonna.mn.us](mailto:Bradley.rademacher@ci.owatonna.mn.us)

# REBATES



## LED Light Bulbs

ON SALE NOW

### Be Bright this fall!

Through December 31, while supplies last, our residential electric customers are eligible for reduced pricing on ENERGY STAR® qualified LED light bulbs. We've partnered with the local retailers below to offer energy-efficient bulbs for as little as 99¢ each!

ENERGY STAR-labeled LEDs use 80% less energy and last up to 25 times longer than incandescent light bulbs. But less watts doesn't mean less light. By replacing the five most-used bulbs in your home with LEDs, you can save up to \$40 in energy costs during the first year alone.

Remember, supplies are limited so get your discounted LEDs before they sell out!



- Alexander Lumber Co.
- Arrow Ace Hardware
- Batteries + Bulbs
- Fareway
- Mills Fleet Farm
- Walmart

The discounted price is your **INSTANT REBATE!** Therefore, LEDs purchased during this promotion are not eligible for a separate CONSERVE & SAVE® rebate.



DON'T FORGET!



Make sure your heating system is working properly and efficiently. Complete a Clean & Tune and apply for a **\$25 REBATE!**

Visit [www.owatonnautilities.com](http://www.owatonnautilities.com) to learn more and download rebate applications with complete terms and conditions.

# CONSERVE & \$AVE®

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.

Bills can pile up just like snow. But a Minnesota state law called the “Cold Weather Rule” is designed to protect people who have trouble paying their utility bills in winter. The Cold Weather Rule applies from October 15 to April 15. It says that utility service affecting your home’s primary source of heat must not be disconnected and must be reconnected during this period if you meet all of the following requirements:

1. Your total household income is less than 50 percent of the state median household income, **and**
2. You enter into a payment agreement with your utility that considers the financial resources of your household, and you continue to make reasonably timely payments under that agreement.

If you are concerned about being able to pay your utility bill, please contact OPU at 507-451-2480. We can provide you with referrals to local energy assistance providers. If you know you’re going to have trouble paying your utility bills, please contact us to work out a payment agreement.



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).



**MINNESOTA COLD WEATHER RULE**

**Do you qualify?**

**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.