

CUSTOMER UPDATE

Backflow Prevention

If you don't want to drink it don't connect it to the water system

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OPU MEMO



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Water is one of our most precious resources. Plants, animals, and humans cannot exist without it. Fresh drinking water is only replenished through the natural water cycle, in which water from seas, lakes, forests, land, rivers and reservoirs evaporates, forms clouds, and returns to earth as precipitation. In some cases, this process can take several years. As demand for water grows, this cycle struggles to keep up making water conservation more important than ever.

This month's newsletter focuses on water and water conservation. Even with our recent rains, drought conditions still exist in some areas of our state and will spread to others as summer moves in.

In Owatonna, most of our water is drawn from aquifers several hundred feet deep. Once the water is drawn from one of our wells, it is treated and pumped into a water tower allowing water to be available even when all pumps are turned off.

Our water distribution system consists of 169 miles of water main with nearly 70% of it being PVC piping. This is particularly important as more infrastructure is being installed adjacent to our water mains. With metal distribution mains, a process called electrolysis can occur when dissimilar metals are near each other. Static electrical charges can become present and over time will lead to advanced corrosion of the pipe. Electrolysis is our primary cause of water main breaks here in Owatonna. The use of PVC water main pipe greatly mitigates electrolysis-type water main breaks and reduces water interruptions our customers may experience. By reducing water main breaks we also conserve water. PVC piping allows for more stability of the water characteristics throughout the system meaning your water will taste just as fantastic at the tower as it does at your home.

Not only is conserving water important, protecting the quality of it is important, as well. Our feature article discusses the importance of backflow prevention. Remember, if you do not want to drink it, do not connect it to your water system.

We take tremendous pride in designing, operating, and maintaining our water system so it will not only provide the best water possible to our customers, but it will withstand the test of time and growth of our community.

Keeping the Community Beautiful

As the weather gets warmer and everyone spends more time outdoors, remember that there are ordinances related to exterior property maintenance that need to be followed. Here are a few items to keep in mind:



- Mow the lawn regularly – try to keep it under the 8-inch height restriction for lots that have been built upon. Undeveloped lots need to be kept below 18-inches.
- Weed and spray regularly to control weeds and keep them from spreading to other properties. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture keeps a list of noxious weeds that are prohibited. More information is available on their website: mda.state.mn.us.
- Keep household trash in a container designed for such use, ensuring that it doesn't leak and that it is always covered. Have regular pickup service scheduled and only put containers by the street on designated pickup days. Containers should be stored in the side or rear yard, or in the garage.
- Personal property should be stored within a building or fully screened so that it is not visible from adjoining properties and public streets. Wood for a wood burning stove or recreational fires needs to be stacked in a neat pile.
- Don't place unwanted items, such as furniture or appliances, on the right-of-way or in the yard. Discarded or discarded items stored outside are considered refuse or junk. Garbage haulers need to be contacted to pick up these items and properly dispose of them.

To report a violation of the weed or nuisance ordinances, visit owatonna.gov and submit a weed or nuisance complaint form. Anonymous submissions are accepted; however, it may delay the processing of the complaint if any other information is needed. Make sure the full address is included; failure to provide the correct address will delay the processing of the complaint. It's up to everyone to keep Owatonna beautiful!

More code information is available on the City of Owatonna website.

CONSERVATION TIP\$

Cleaning the dust and debris off refrigerator coils is an easy way to save a little money on utility bills. These coils can be found either behind or below your refrigerator. To clean them, unplug your fridge and carefully pull it forward out from the wall. Be careful not to damage the waterline running to an ice maker. Gently vacuum the coils with your edging attachment while using a brush to get into places the vacuum doesn't reach.



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Backflow Prevention

A close-up photograph of a young child with light-colored hair, wearing a white shirt with a blue pattern, drinking water from a chrome faucet. The child's hands are cupped under the running water. The background is a warm, orange-toned wall.

If you don't want to drink it, do not connect it to the water system

It is that time of year again! Spring is in full bloom, and we are here to make sure everyone is supplied with good clean water for all the summer activities.

When it comes to watering your yard, there are a few things to consider. The biggest one is the time of day you water your lawn. The best time to water your lawn is between 6:00 am and 9:00 a.m. This allows the water to penetrate the soil and soak in before it can be evaporated by the sun and heat.

Another thing to consider is the number of times you water your lawn. Your lawn only needs 1" of water a week to stay healthy and lush. A good consistent watering pattern is around 3 times a week; for instance, Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday. By doing this consistently, your lawn adapts and can hold or shed what it needs.

The last thing is to make sure your irrigation system and backflow assembly are working properly. For the inexperienced irrigation owner, turning on the system sounds like a simple enough task but there might be more to it than you think. For starters, every residential irrigation system in Owatonna that is connected to city-supplied water requires backflow preventer testing at least once a year. The backflow preventer must go through an annual inspection per Owatonna Public Utilities specifications.

The backflow preventer keeps irrigation water from entering and potentially contaminating drinking water lines. You need to have a certified person install it, maintain it and test it. They will have paperwork for you to fill out that they'll turn into Owatonna Public Utilities. Not every irrigation contractor is a certified backflow tester, so it's important to ask to see the contractor's certification number.

What is backflow? Backflow is the reversal of water flow from its intended direction. Whenever a water utility connects a customer to its water system, the intention is for the water to flow from the water system to the customer, and not the other way around. OPU does not want it back. A backflow event occurs when water is unintentionally pulled or pushed back into a public water source. The problem is, the water could contain anything from generally offensive pollutants to fertilizer, animal waste or pests from the irrigation system. Residential irrigation sites are a frequent source of water contamination.

It is our responsibility to provide clean, safe drinking water to our community and we are extremely dedicated to creating tools and programs to protect our public water supply systems. Tools like backflow prevention, function as public health protectors for you, your family, friends, and neighbors. Remember, if you do not want to drink it, do not connect it to your water system.

NATIONAL

LINEMAN APPRECIATION DAY

April 18, 2024

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO!!



LEFT TO RIGHT:

Jake Perdue, Jeff Bertram, Mathew Madery, Brandon Belch, Nick Kleindl, Tom Foss, Ryan Deering, Samuel Bahl, Tony Hartle, Dalton Meier, Nate Brinkman and Lance Diderrich



Jeff (above), Dalton, Samuel, Tony and Nick (right) participated in the 2024 APPA Lineman's Rodeo in Lafayette, LA





Smart

WATERING TIPS

DID YOU KNOW

- Lawns only need 1" of water per WEEK.

Setting your sprinklers to run for 30-35 minutes twice a week promotes deep root growth and creates drought tolerant lawns.

- The best watering times are between 6a - 9a

Water is allowed to penetrate the soil and soak in before it can evaporate from the sun and heat.

- Concrete won't grow

Set your sprinklers so they are not watering the sidewalk or driveway.

FOR YOUR OUTDOOR PLANTS & YARD:

The following tips can help you conserve water this summer while maintaining a healthy lawn and garden.

- Install a rain sensor on your irrigation system, or use a simple rain gauge when watering.
- Do NOT water if the grass springs back.
- Collect rain water using a rain barrel to water your potted plants. OPU offers a \$10 rebate for rain barrels.
- Plant drought resistant and/or native plants. Native plants require less water.
- Mulch around plants and trees to reduce evaporation and weeds. Be sure to keep the mulch back from the tree flare 2-4" to prevent subtle, long-term ill-effects.
- The second best time to water is early evening when the plants still have time to dry before the sun goes down.
- Keep mower decks raised to 3-4" to shade the ground and reduce moisture evaporation.
- Keep mower blades sharp. A yard mowed with sharp blades will use 40-60% less water.

Cycle & Soak

Saves Water Outdoors

Are you aware...

Overwatering is more common than many realize and can cause weed growth, plant disease, and runoff that carries fertilizers and pesticides into local water bodies. Landscapes with clay soils or steep slopes may benefit from dividing irrigation runtimes into smaller intervals with short breaks to allow water more time to soak in. This practice is referred to as cycle-and-soak.

When Cycle-and-Soak Makes Sense

In clay soils, water soaks in at a slower rate resulting in puddles, pools and runoff. Sloping landscapes tend to have water runoff before it can be absorbed. In either case, breaking up irrigation runtimes into shorter intervals allows the water to soak in and plants receive the amount of water they need without water going to waste.

Getting Started with Cycle-and-Soak

Split runtimes for each irrigation zone and water in short intervals based on the amount of water the landscape needs. For each zone, record the total runtime needed and the amount of time it takes for water to start pooling. This is the maximum time to water in one cycle. If it is equal to or greater than your daily scheduled time, cycle-and-soak is not necessary. Repeat for each zone.

WaterSense & Cycle-and-Soak



The WaterSense label helps identify water-efficient irrigation controllers that automatically adjust the irrigation schedule based on soil moisture levels, local weather and/or landscape conditions. In some landscapes, additional adjustments to your irrigation schedule can result in more water savings and a healthier landscape.

Where can I find more information?

For more information regarding Cycle-and-Soak, WaterSense and/or help determining the amount of water plants need each week, visit the EPA's website at:
<https://www.epa.gov/watersense/outdoors>

Drought Tolerant

Using drought-tolerant plants in your landscape is one of the best ways to conserve water. Drought-tolerant landscaping is a viable and attractive alternative to thirsty green lawns. Drought-resistant plants reduce maintenance while using fewer resources.

Consider using some of these plants in your landscape and use the tips to create a beautiful landscape and save water this summer.

Landscaping tips:

- Replace thirsty turf lawn with drought-tolerant groundcovers tough enough to walk on.
- Mulch with layer of organic matter or small stones to help retain moisture and reduce weeds.
- Choose plants with interesting foliage, texture, structure, and contrasting shapes to create multi-seasonal interest.
- Install an efficient watering system such as a drip irrigation.
- Use hardscaping elements such as boulders, patios, and pathways to add structure and define spaces.

Drought tolerant plants for our Zone:

- Aster
- Beardtongue
- Black-eyed Susan
- Blanket Flower
- Blue Fescue
- Bugleweed
- Catmint
- Cranesbill Geranium
- Hen & Chicks
- Pinks
- Purple Cornflower
- Russian Sage
- Spurge
- Stonecrop
- Wormwood
- Yarrow

Information for this article obtained from the GardenDesign.com website

Save
the Date

OPU IS TURNING 100 --
HELP US CELEBRATE

October 10, 2024

MORE INFORMATION
REVEALED CLOSER
TO THE DATE

ALWAYS ASSUME ALL DOWNED LINES ARE LIVE

- Call us at 507-451-2480 if you see a downed power line.
- Stay as far away as possible from a downed power line. Keep children and pets away, too.
- Don't drive over a downed power line.
- If a power line falls on your car, stay inside the vehicle, warn people not to touch the car, and call 911.
- If the car is on fire:
 - Open the door, but do not STEP out of the car.
 - With hands at your side, jump completely free of the vehicle so you are not touching the car when you land on the ground.
 - Never make a connection between your body, the car's shell, and the road.
 - Keep both feet close together and shuffle away from the vehicle WITHOUT picking up your feet.
- Never climb a tree with power lines running through it.

Customer Owned BURIED GAS PIPING NOTIFICATION

In compliance with the Department of Transportation, Pipeline Safety Regulations, Part 192.16,

Owatonna Public Utilities is notifying customers about their responsibility for customer-owned gas piping. Owatonna Public Utilities DOES NOT own or maintain gas piping downstream (house side) of the natural gas meter. Gas piping after the gas meter is customer-owned. Maintenance and inspection of customer-owned piping is the customers' responsibility.

To ensure safe and reliable operation, customer-owned buried gas piping should be:

- Periodically inspected for leaks
- Periodically inspected for corrosion if the piping is metallic
- Repaired if any unsafe condition is discovered, or flow of gas should be shut off
- Located and marked in advance when excavation is performed or is about to be performed near the buried gas piping
- Carefully excavated by hand when work is performed near the piping



Piping coming into the home is the customer's responsibility.



How Good is Our Water?

Here at OPU, we often get questions about the quality of our water. Sometimes our Customer Service Representatives field that question from a customer that's come in to pay their bill and is just making conversation, other times it's from folks who just moved to town and want to know if it's safe to drink the water from the tap. But that question gets asked most at our Steele County Free Fair booth in the Four Seasons building – where we happily provide free water to fairgoers bravely enduring the summer heat.

So, where do we get our water? We get it from own wells right here in Owatonna, from the Jordan aquifer deep beneath our

feet. But our wells are quite a bit more advanced than the wells people used in centuries past. Our pumps are robust enough to deliver millions of gallons of water each day - through miles of pipe that run all through town – and the wells are over 700 feet deep, with our deepest well being over 1,300 feet deep. For reference, the IDS Center in Minneapolis is 792 feet tall.

You can find our latest water test results on our website at owatonnautilities.com under 'Safety' and then 'Water Safety'. When looking at those numbers, just know that 'mg/L' is milligrams per liter, which is also called 'parts per million' (ppm). What's that mean? One part per million is roughly equal to one drop out of a million drops. Are the numbers on our test results good? Very. All are below what the EPA wants to see, and most are at a fraction of the EPA's mandates.

But how good is it? Well, I guess that's a little subjective, and the state of a given customers water pipes is going to muddy the waters a bit (no pun intended), but awhile back we did a fun little test at the high school where we asked students to compare the taste of our water straight from the tap to store-bought bottled water. OPU's tap water won. 58 students picked our tap water, 52 picked bottled water, with 29 undecided. I sorta want to claim those 29 undecided votes for OPU, because if you thought both waters tasted equally good, I have to assume those students went and bought a water bottle and just refilled that thing from the tap forever rather than shell out a couple bucks a bottle at a time – sliding those votes in the OPU column. Pretty sure that's solid logic.

2023 Consumer Confidence Report Now Available

City of Owatonna, PWSID 1740007

The 2023 Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) regarding our community water supply system is available for your review on-line at the following address: www.owatonnautilities.com/consumer-confidence/

Please take a few minutes, read the CCR, and be aware of the quality of your drinking water!

Current MCL violations: **NONE**

State and Federal Safe Drinking Water Regulations require all Community Public Water Systems to distribute an Annual Water Quality Report, officially known as the Consumer Confidence Report, by June 30th of each year. This report is available at the above link, however, if you would prefer a paper copy of the report, please feel free to call 507-451-2480.

BUSINESS BITES



It's time to phase out single-pass water cooling.

What is single-pass water cooling? It's the process of using fresh water to cool a piece of equipment, then sending that water right into the sewer system without being used for other purposes. Single-pass water cooling is an inefficient use of water that can have negative impacts to both the fresh water supply as well as the wastewater treatment process.

New installations of single-pass water cooling are allowed only under very extreme circumstances, but existing systems are allowed to operate until the end of their life.

What can you do to eliminate single-pass cooling at your business? The best options include investing in an air-cooled chiller system that uses a closed water or glycol loop to cool the equipment. Under some circumstances, these systems may even provide "free cooling" in the winter!



*April Showers
Can bring
May flowers..*

**Keep them growing with
a Rain Barrel!**

Purchase a Rain Barrel
and receive a **\$10 rebate.**

To apply, download a *Water Efficiency
Rebate Application* at
OwatonnaUtilities.com.

**CONSERVE
& \$AVE™**



**PARTNERING IN
ENERGY SOLUTIONS**

**COMMERCIAL
CUSTOMERS
CAN GET 0%
FINANCING!**

Financing may be available for qualifying energy efficiency projects through our Partnering in Energy Solutions program. This financing allows you to pay for the project on your utility bill over a one or two-year period at 0% interest. The maximum loan amount is \$25,000.

Learn more at **OwatonnaUtilities.com**
or call us at (507) 451-2480.

CONSERVE & \$AVE™

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

Office: 451-2480 Service: 451-1616

EXPLORE THE HIDDEN GEMS OF UTILITY CAREERS

Discover the possibilities

Waterworks Operator

National salary range
\$42,400 - \$62,200



Scan to watch
Employee Interview

Job description: Operate, monitor and maintain equipment at the Central Water Works, remote wells, and water storage reservoirs. Complete testing and record the results needed to fill out various reports. Submit the reports in a timely manner to the proper governmental agencies.

Education Requirements:

Associates Degree in
Water Environment
Technologies.

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.smarthub.coop
- Phone at (507) 451-2480 Option 2 or 1-888-228-2398 (Available 24/7)
- Automatic Withdrawal; bank account or credit card
- Drive-up drop box located in our parking lot
- Drop box locations at CashWise and HyVee Food Store
- Mail to P.O. Box 800, Owatonna, MN 55060

Moving?

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

