



**OWATONNA**  
**PUBLIC UTILITIES**

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DECEMBER 2017

# CUSTOMER UPDATE



## FEATURING: STAY SAFE FROM SCAMS

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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

Our infrastructure investments for the next several years are projected to increase, primarily due to infrastructure replacements and improvements needed to support customer growth. Since the economic crash of 2008, we had not seen significant growth in the residential and commercial/industrial areas. Over the last couple years, growth has been steadily increase, creating a need to replace and add more infrastructure.

The electric delivery system infrastructure investments are increasing due to several large projects. These projects include replacing our existing radio communications system with a fiber optics communications system. This will improve reliability and security of our network control system. Other infrastructure improvements include adding more wires, poles, and transformers in order to meet the increased electrical demand forecasted to be over 6% next year, the most we have seen since 2008.

What these infrastructure investments increases mean for electrical rates is residential customers' monthly service charge will increase by \$2.00 a month; however, there will be no increase in the monthly commodity cost. This will amount to an average overall increase of about 1.59%. Increasing the monthly service charge makes sense when costs are increasing due to infrastructure costs.

The water system infrastructure investments are increasing due to significant water main expansions, pressure and capacity requirements on the west side of highway 35, and water main replacements due to aging throughout the city. Without addressing the expansion and water pressure needs, businesses would not be able to expand or build due to lack of water pressure for their fire protection systems.

What this means for water rates is an overall 4.95% increase across all customer classes. Most residential customers will see a \$1.00 monthly service charge increase and a one-cent increase per hundred cubic feet of water used. We plan to have a cost of service study done next year so we can review recommendations on how to fund the long-term infrastructure improvements.

Most residential customers are enrolled in our Water Service Line Protection Program. This program protects customers from most costs associated with leaks, frozen lines and repairs on the water line running to your house. These repairs are averaging \$5,300 per incident. About 35 people a year have used this program. Currently, the program costs \$1.99 a month. The good news is we are lowering the cost for this program by \$1.00 a month.

On another positive note, our natural gas costs continue to decrease primarily due to low purchased commodity costs. Even though we are making infrastructure improvements over the next several years, the reduction in gas costs more than offsets our capital cost increases. This year, we began natural gas main infrastructure improvements as we started our conversion to increase our gas pressure from 5 psi to 50 psi. This increase will support customers who are adding additional natural gas appliances including fireplaces and on-demand hot water heaters.

Overall, this means natural gas rates will decrease approximately 1%. Residential customers will see an increase of their monthly service charge of \$2.00 and an overall average yearly decrease of approximately \$4.39 in their commodity costs.

In total, average residential customer costs will be going up approximately \$1.88 a month, which is \$22.53 a year.

I wish you a safe and happy holiday season!

## CONSERVATION TIP\$

Make sure your thermostat program is set for winter to save money on your heating bill. Make sure the clock is set properly and program it to reduce the temperature when you are working and sleeping. Eight degrees for 8 hours can save you up to 8% on your heating bill!

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



### WELCOME! ¡BIENVENIDO! NYOB ZOO! KU SOO DHAWOOW!

A warm welcome and hello from your Owatonna Public Library! Colder weather is here and we have returned to staffing the building for you every day of the week. Owatonna Public Library is open 9:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, & Thursday, open 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, Friday, & Saturday, and open 1:00 – 5:00 p.m. on Sunday (October-April). If you have Internet access, the website and online resources are available 24/7 at [www.owatonna.info](http://www.owatonna.info).

#### OPL Mobile

If you have a smart phone or a tablet you can take your library with you! Find the free OPL Mobile app in the app store for your device. You can also go to [owatonna.boopsie.com](http://owatonna.boopsie.com) to install OPL Mobile or to preview it. With OPL Mobile you can search the library catalog, check your account, find OPL events, take a look at monthly Staff Picks, ask a question, check out and download eBooks or eAudiobooks. Use your card to download or stream music from Freegal (Free + Legal!).

#### December Calendar Notes

The Owatonna Public Library will be closed from Saturday December 23 to Monday December 25th. We will reopen on December 26th.

Preparations have begun for the annual Book Sale will be taking place on December 26th from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm and December 27th from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm with plenty of audio visual choices as well as books to choose from.

#### Children's Programs

Tuesday mornings are Tale Time for preschoolers in Children's Services, at 9:30 a.m. and again at 10:30 a.m. Join us every other Thursday evening in December at 6:30 p.m. for Family Storytimes! Your preschooler ages 0-6 sings, rhymes, and reads. No need to register, and Mom, Dad, Grandparents, big sister or brother, and any other family or friends are invited to join the fun.

On Tuesday December 19th we will be offering Tech Tuesdays from 6:00 to 7:15 pm. This program is for ages 7-14 years old and will be featuring the topic Curcuits. On Tuesday, December 12, we will be offering Spanish Storytime from 6:30 – 7:30. This program is for all ages, and will include a snack and a craft.

#### Programs for the Young at Heart

Movies at the Library are presented on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month, with showings at 2:00 p.m. and again at 7:00 p.m. in the 3rd Floor Gainey Room. The upcoming movie that will be shown in the Gainey Room on Thursday December 14th called "It's a Wonderful Life". This movie will be shown at 2:00 P.M. In addition, there will also be a special presentation at 6:30 with the movie "Star Wars: the Force Awakens" showing that will include trivia and a costume contest prior to the movie. This presentation is sure to be a fun event for all Star Wars fans.

#### Building Maintenance

The Library elevators have been out of service since the week of October 30th to receive much needed maintenance. We are pleased to announce that the service on the elevator is now complete.

#### [www.owatonna.info](http://www.owatonna.info)

For more information, visit your Owatonna Public Library in person at 105 North Elm Ave. or call 507-444-2460. Visit us without leaving your couch via the OPL Mobile app or online at [www.owatonna.info](http://www.owatonna.info). Find us on Facebook and @owatonnalibrary on Twitter.

#### MAYOR

Tom Kuntz

#### COUNCIL MEMBERS

David Burbank  
Nathan Dotson  
Jeff Okerberg  
Kevin Raney  
Greg Schultz  
Brent Svenby  
Doug Voss



# STAY SAFE FROM SCAMS

*Information for this article obtained from the Utilities United Against Scams' website and Consumer's Guide to Impostor Utility Scams; photo from WITN.*

Many electric, water, and natural gas customers throughout the country are being targeted by impostor utility scams each day. Scammers typically use phone, in-person, and online tactics to target customers. Raising awareness and educating customers about scams is Utilities United Against Scams (UUAS) top priority. UUAS will continue to help spread awareness of the suspicious behaviors and the evolving tactics that scammers use to target customers. It is important that customers call their utilities directly to check on the status of their accounts if they are ever unsure about the authenticity of a caller or the identity of a service worker, or if they suspect any fraudulent activity.

## **Common Scams and Signs**

Scammers typically use three tactics (phone, in-person, and internet) to target utility customers; however, there are more than 10 types of known scams, with new scams emerging almost daily, and scammers might use one, two or all three tactics on customers for certain types of scams.

Scammers also target small businesses, tending to call during peak hours, threatening disconnection if the bills are not paid immediately.

The following are several types of current phone scams targeting electric, water and natural gas customers nationwide:

- **Disconnection Deception:** Scammers call threatening disconnection of your utility service, demanding immediate payment by prepaid cards purchased at a local retail store and insisting you call them back with the card information to make a payment.
- **Equipment or repair bogus fee:** Scammers call demanding a separate payment to replace or install a utility-related device or meter.

- **Overpayment Trick:** Scammers call claiming you have overpaid your utility bill, and you need to provide personal bank account information or a credit card to facilitate a refund.
- **Bill Payment or Credit Con:** Scammers may provide you a phony bank, Federal Reserve, secret account, or Social Security trust account routing number for you to use to pay your utility bill or to receive a credit for your utility bills. They may also offer federal assistance on your utility bills, claiming you are eligible for a reduced rate. In exchange for personal information, you may get what you think is a legitimate payment account number, but is really just a way for the scammer to obtain your personal information.
- **Power Restoration Rip Off:** Scammers call offering to restore power quickly or in a preferential order for immediate payment typically in the aftermath of a disaster with wide spread outages.
- **Smishing Scam:** Smishing, short for SMS phishing, is a relatively new scam that attempts to trick mobile phone users into giving scammers personal information via text or SMS message.

Utility companies will send notifications in the mail for disconnection, will call for an appointment if equipment needs to be changed, will apply any over-payments to your account, do not require payment to restore services after a disaster, and typically do not text you unless you have signed up for a specific service offered by your utility.

If you are ever in doubt, contact OPU at 507-451-2480.

For more information or to download the UUAS' Consumer guide to Impostor Utility Scams, visit Utilities United Against Scams website at [utilitiesunited.org](http://utilitiesunited.org).

# EQUIPMENT SERIES



OPU employees have a different look these days on job sites as well as at our field facilities. The hard hats worn by employees, an important part of personal protective equipment, have an unusual feature: a tag at the back of the helmet indicates when it's time to get a new hard hat.

Because OPU puts its employee safety first, two years ago it opted to replace its existing stock of hard hats with ones that had this improved safety feature.

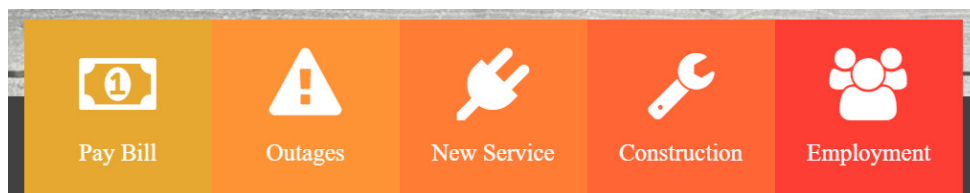
These distinctive hard hats have an ultraviolet (UV) indicator to let wearers know when it was time to replace their hard hats due to UV exposure. UV rays wear down the integrity of the hard hat.

The UV tag is red as long as the hard hat retains its original safety protections. But when the tag turns white, workers are required to trade their hard hat in for a replacement.

The 3M Company makes OPU's hard hats in their New Ulm, Minnesota, plant. So far this year, Owatonna has replaced five hard hats that had been compromised by prolonged exposure to UV rays.

## NEW FEATURE

We are please to announce OPU customers can now report outages on-line via our website. Once an outage notification is received, a confirmation email is sent to the customer reporting the outage. If that email is not received within a few minutes, please call 507-451-1616 to report your outage.



Customers can also see if their address has already been included in a reported outage. If a large outage has been reported, the area will be designated on the map with an outlined & shaded shape. Visit [www.owatonnautilities.com](http://www.owatonnautilities.com) and click the outages box on our home page. To report your outage by phone, call 507-451-1616 24-hours a day.

## OPU HIGHLIGHT



**Mark Fritsch,**  
**General Manager**

Mark Fritsch has been our general manager since 2011. If you've read Mark's newsletter memos, you know that he is passionate about safety, proud of OPU and its employees, and committed to continuous improvement. We put Mark in the OPU Spotlight this month to tell you some things about Mark you might otherwise not learn.

One of those things is that Mark was born on Halloween, and has tried for years to grow giant pumpkins! Due to deer, rabbits, weather, and other challenges it is one area where he has not (yet) achieved success. It's a bit of a sore topic... but, oh well.

Mark enjoys making a difference outside of OPU as well as within. He is a Rotarian and has been a scout leader. He has facilitated strategic planning for a number of organizations including the City of Owatonna and the Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce.

Mark began his career as a power plant engineer for Xcel Energy. During his 32 years at Xcel, he held a number of different positions and was the Director of Government Affairs and Rates when he left.

Having spent much of his career working in power plants, Mark was drawn to OPU in part by the opportunity to repurpose our flood damaged power plant. He thought he might stay at OPU only until the repurposing project was complete, but fell in love with the people at OPU and has continued to lead us ever since.

# ICE ON METERS

When your gas meter is covered with ice and snow, it can cause a potentially dangerous situation. If there is snow on your meter, brush it off. If it's covered with ice, give us a call at 451-1616 and we'll take care of it for you.

In addition, snow and ice should be cleared from exhaust and combustion air vents for gas appliances to prevent the accumulation of carbon monoxide in buildings and to prevent operational problems for the combustion equipment. Monitor the accumulation of snow or ice blocking regulator or relief valve vents which could prevent regulators and relief valves from functioning properly. Use caution in cleaning snow from around the piping on service regulator set as it is susceptible to damage that could result in failure of the equipment. Where possible, use a broom instead of a shovel to clear snow off regulators, meters, and associated piping.

As always, 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 a spark could ignite the gas and cause an explosion.



## 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:

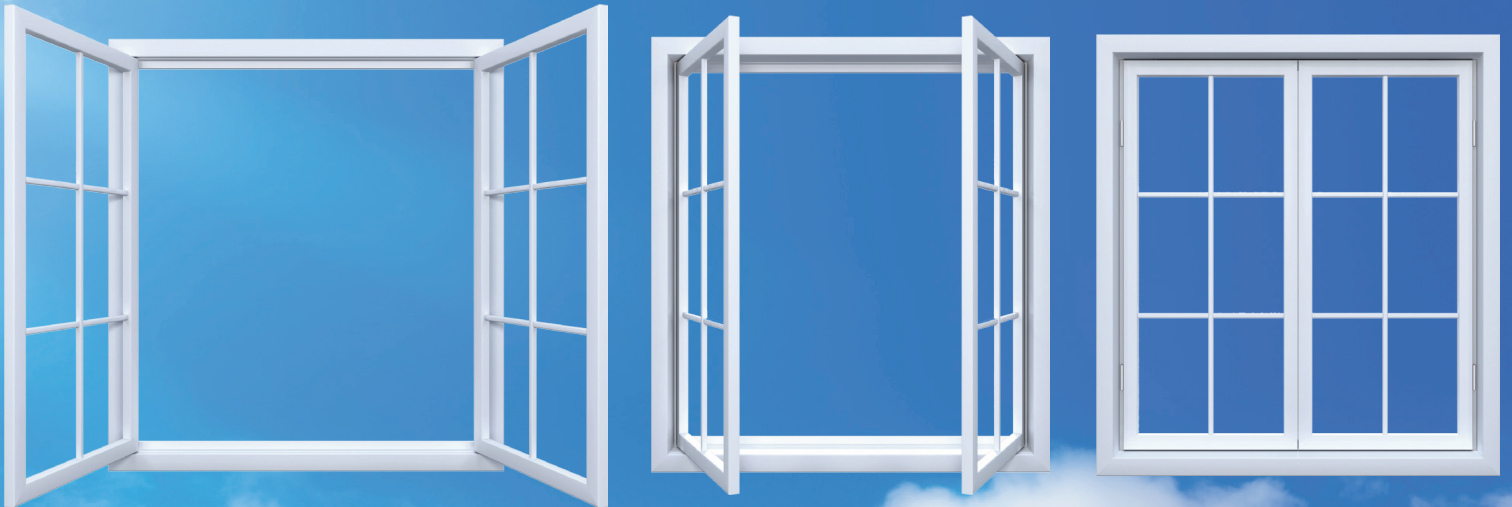
$$\text{FEE} = (\text{Parcel Acreage}/0.33) \times \text{Intensity Factor} \times \text{Current ERU}$$

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.

# REBATES



**Our window and  
glass entry door rebates  
are closing... for good!**

As new rebate offerings open, some need to be closed.  
If you have pending rebate applications for windows or glass entry doors  
installed in 2017, the last day to submit them is March 31, 2018.

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

**CONSERVE & \$AVE<sup>®</sup>**



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

Office: 451-2480 Service: 451-1616

INDICIA

## 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.



*Merry Christmas and  
Happy New Year  
from Everyone at the  
Owatonna Public Utilities*



Your opinion matters to us.  
Please take a few minutes  
to tell us how we did by  
visiting our website at  
[owatonnautilities.com/customer survey](http://owatonnautilities.com/customer survey) 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 [schmoltt@owatonnautilities.com](mailto:schmoltt@owatonnautilities.com).

## Gas Leak?

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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.



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