



**OWATONNA**  
**PUBLIC UTILITIES**

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JANUARY 2018

# CUSTOMER UPDATE



## Part 2

### FEATURING: STAY SAFE FROM SCAMS

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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

While ringing in the New Year many people start working on their new year's resolution. After a quick internet search, I found some of the most common resolutions were eating healthier, learning a new language, and save more money. Although I can't help you eat healthier, and I don't speak a second language, I would like to help you save more money in 2018!

If you didn't already know, January 10th is the Annual Cut Your Utility Cost Day. This gives me a great opportunity to write about one of the questions I get asked most when I work with customers as well as a couple other tips to save money on your utility bill.

One of the questions I am asked most often is how to properly program a thermostat. Keep in mind, there is no perfect way to program one. The specific program often depends on the building and those who live there, so it can take some adjusting to get just right. In the winter, you want the thermostat to set back (turn down) the temperature while you are away for work as well as at night when you sleep, then turn it back up in the evenings and mornings. Because your home takes time to cool off, you can actually schedule the setback earlier than you leave or go to bed. Start by trying 30 minutes before you leave, or 45 minutes before you leave. If your home cools off too fast, try adjusting the schedule accordingly.

Your furnace will run right up to the time of the setback, but when it's ready to heat back up most thermostats have a "recovery" time. If you set your furnace to your morning temperature at 6:00 am, the recovery mode will actually turn the furnace on early so it will be up to temperature by 6:00 am. Recovery times may vary among manufactures, but is usually around 15 minutes early. It's important to know this, though, so you program your thermostat properly instead of setting the time you want the furnace to turn back on.

I also am asked what temperature to heat a home to. Many sources recommend heating your home no warmer than 68 degrees in the winter but many people are most comfortable at 70 or 72 degrees. If you are, try decreasing the thermostat by 1 degree and see if you notice a difference. The most important consideration is what you should set your thermostat back to while you are away. Reducing the temperature by 8 to 10 degrees can save you around 8% on your heating costs over a winter. There are other considerations to make as well such as making sure the temperature isn't too cold for your pets. Remember, this information can easily be applied to your summer schedule as well!

Another tip to save money on your utility bill, without costing any money, is making a minor adjustment to how you wash your clothes. It was commonly taught that washing your clothes in warm or hot water gets them cleaner than washing in cold water. With modern washers and detergents, clothes washed in cold water will come out just as clean. You might even notice your colors stay brighter longer! About 17% of the average residential utility bill actually goes to heating water so this little change can make a big difference over the course of a year.

If low humidity is a problem in your home during the winter, you can also consider getting a clothes drying rack for your laundry room. Air drying your clothes will save you money on running your dryer, as well as allow you to turn off your humidifier. Make sure to keep an eye on your humidity level though. Look for moisture and condensation on your windows and doors. If you see condensation, it's time to start using the dryer again.

Following these tips as well as those found at [www.tinyurl.com/OPU-Tips](http://www.tinyurl.com/OPU-Tips) can help you cut your utility costs year round, not just January 10th.

HIGHLIGHTING: OWATONNA DEGNER REGIONAL AIRPORT



### **Business Aviation and Economic Development**

The Owatonna Degner Regional Airport serves the business aviation needs of the community as one of Minnesota's key system airports. Many local companies own and operate corporate aircraft or use the facility to bring in customers, vendors, or decision makers. Business Aviation is much more efficient than flying the airlines and saves time resulting in cost savings.

### **MAYOR**

Tom Kuntz

### **COUNCIL MEMBERS**

David Burbank

Nathan Dotson

Jeff Okerberg

Kevin Raney

Greg Schultz

Brent Svenby

Doug Voss

The ability of a community to accommodate corporate aviation is a valuable tool for local business development. From an economic development standpoint, the airport plays a key role in bringing in potential customers for local businesses, facilitating efficient day trips, and providing a gateway for business development. Additionally, companies seeking to build, expand, or relocate, often seek out locations that can accommodate their corporate aircraft needs.

Our airport is positioned to meet this need with well-maintained modern facilities and a dual runway configuration to accommodate most general and business aviation needs. The goal is to continue to offer first class facilities and services while adhering to a high safety standard. This is particularly important as many times the airport serves as the "front door" to the community representing the first impression of the city to these visitors.

The airport has significant capability for the region and serves as a gateway to Southern MN. Please contact us with any questions or check out [www.owatonnaairport.com](http://www.owatonnaairport.com).

### **Business at the airport**

#### **Langer Aviation**

The airport is home to Langer Aviation providing aircraft maintenance, flight instruction, and aircraft rental services. Learn to fly here! According to a recent report by Boeing, the industry as a whole will require an estimated 637,000 commercial pilots around the world in the next twenty years, with 117,000 needed in the United States alone. Whether for fun or for a career why not check it out right here at the Owatonna Degner Regional Airport?

#### **John Klatt Airshows**

From its headquarters at Owatonna's Degner Regional Airport, John Klatt Airshows, Inc. (JKAI) continues to thrive in the airshow industry. From May to November in 2017, JKAI brought their brand of precision aerobatics to some of the largest venues in the country executing twelve events, and performing in front of more than 2.5 million spectators. The company's primary sponsor is Jack Links Beef Jerky, feeding their wild side across the US from right here in Owatonna.

#### **Civil Air Patrol**

The Civil Air Patrol (CAP) is the official auxiliary of the United States Air Force. The Owatonna Squadron is made up of approximately 22 cadet members with a number of senior members. The CAP meets weekly at the Owatonna Degner Regional Airport with the mission of: Aerospace Education, Cadet Programs, and Emergency Services.

# SCAM ALERT

## 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.

Last month we discussed phone scams but noted scammers use in-person and internet resources, as well. This month we will discuss some of these. 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

The following are types of known utility impostor scammers knocking on electric, water, and natural gas customers' doors nationwide:

- Contractor Con: Scammers posing as utility workers or contractors affiliated with your utility may knock on your door claiming to be employed or hired by the utility company to reset, repair, replace, or inspect your utility meter or other utility related device. If a utility employee or authorized contractor needs access to your home, an appointment will be scheduled in advance, and proper identification will be provided for your review.
- Home Improvement Huckster: Scammers posing as utility workers may appear unannounced at your front door offering a free energy audit, efficiency inspection, water quality or pressure testing, or some other service. These unsolicited intruders may be pitching unnecessary expensive products or attempting to steal items from you. Unless your utility company has notified you in advance, or you initiated a request for such a service, do not let them into your home or business.
- Leak Lie: Scammers posing as utility workers may knock on your door claiming that there is a major gas or water leak in the area and that they need to come inside to check the pipes or lines. They may try to collect your personal information for later identity theft, or distract you to remove valuables from your

home. A utility company will typically call you in advance to set an appointment for such a service.

The following are types of suspicious emails being sent to electric, water, and natural gas customers nationwide.

- Bogus Bills: Scammers send suspicious emails that appear to be a bill sent by your utility company, potentially featuring your utility's logo and color scheme. Do not click on any links or attachments in any email unless you have verified the sender. You may be directed to a scam website designed to steal your personal information, or you might install malicious software onto your computer without ever knowing it. Utility companies typically send bills by mail, unless you have opted to receive your bill by email.
- Employment Ruse: Scammers post spoofed utility employment listings on job-search websites and contact potential job applicants with employment offers in an attempt to trick them into divulging personal information. Scammers may also send checks to the victims to make purchases, which are deposited by the victim and later returned for insufficient funds. Utility companies typically post their job openings on their own websites.

General Tips to Avoid Impostor Utility Scams: 1) Protect personal information; 2) Take your time; 3) Always ask questions; 4) Report the scam to your utility; 5) Pay your utility only; and 6) Stay updated on scams.

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 is one of the only utilities to own and operate a frost chain trencher. This equipment is similar to a standard trenching bar, but is specially designed to cut through frozen ground in the winter.

The chain uses special carbide cutters, or teeth, to chew through frozen roads and dirt that standard cutting equipment cannot cut through. To increase the longevity of the equipment, these teeth are designed to be replaced when they are too worn.

OPU's frost chain bar is a unique piece of equipment because of its size as well. With a 6 foot bar, it is a foot longer than those manufactured today allowing us to cut through even the deepest frost encountered in the 2014 polar vortex.

The frost chain is most frequently used to gain access to a water main breaks. Traditional methods to access water main breaks in the winter involves using large equipment with a jack hammer to break up the ground. It can take more than twice as long to use a jack hammer than it does to use a frost chain. OPU workers are able to reduce the time it takes to gain access to and repair a leak by using a frost chain.

## OPU HIGHLIGHT



**Toni Van Esch,**  
Supervisor, Customer Care

Toni Van Esch celebrates her 2-year anniversary with OPU in January. Toni started as a Customer Service Representative and has recently accepted position of Customer Service Supervisor bringing a great background and experience with her.

Toni has a background in home inspection, real estate, call center supervisory and a B.A. degree in Organizational Management and Leadership. One of the things that drew her to OPU was her interest in Renewable Energy.

Toni resides in Owatonna with her family and enjoys spending time at the lake cabin with family and friends. She is proud of her stepchildren, who both play hockey, as well as her many nieces and nephews.

Toni has enjoyed volunteering as a softball, basketball coach and as a Big Sister in past years. She was awarded the Minnesota Big Sister of the Year while volunteering. She is also a member of the National Association of Realtors and enjoys spending time remodeling homes.

During the flooding in 2016, Toni was happy to see the OPU office design worked as planned allowing everyone to work as normal. She appreciates the people she works with and looks forward to continuing to help OPU evolve.

Thank you Toni for your commitment to OPU and the Community!

## NEW FEATURE

### WATER SERVICE LINE PROTECTION PROGRAM

Protect yourself from the unexpected cost of service line repairs.

We are reducing the monthly program cost from \$1.99/mo. to **only \$0.99/mo.**



208 S. Walnut Ave.  
P.O. Box 800 • Owatonna, MN 55060  
**507-451-2480**



# 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.



## What YOU Can Do to Prevent Winter Stormwater Pollution

Employ these simple practices during winter weather to prevent pollution to our valuable local water resources:

- First line of defense should always be frequent shoveling and physical removal of snow/ice instead of application of deicers
- Pay attention to the forecast and remember deicers are only effective in temperatures above 25 degrees Fahrenheit
- Always be sure to read and familiarize yourself with the products you choose to use
- Sweep up excess salt and sand following a storm, it can be reused
- Pile shovel or plowed snow away on vegetated areas and away from paved surfaces to prevent runoff during thaw
- Avoid piling upstream of paved surfaces to prevent slippery conditions as the snow melts
- Sweep up residual sand, grit, and garbage immediately after snowmelt from piles
- Keep gutters and drainage pathways clear and free of debris to prevent backup and unwanted freezing
- Avoid unnecessary travel during snow storms to allow roads to be cleared safely and timely

**Take time for proper best management practices and future generations will thank you for clean water!**

For further information regarding the City Stormwater Management Program, contact Bradley D. Rademacher Water Quality/Stormwater Specialist, (507) 774-7300 or [Bradley.rademacher@ci.owatonna.mn.us](mailto:Bradley.rademacher@ci.owatonna.mn.us).

# REBATES

## NEW REBATE IN 2018!

### WIFI ENABLED PROGRAMMABLE THERMOSTAT



- WI-FI ENABLED THERMOSTATS ALLOW FOR REMOTE ACCESS VIA SMARTPHONE OR COMPUTER!

**\$75 PER UNIT**

## RESIDENTIAL ENERGY AUDITS

### CONSERVE & \$AVE<sup>®</sup> HOUSE CALL



- STANDARD AUDIT: \$50 co-pay (\$300 value!)
- PERFORMANCE AUDIT: \$125 co-pay (\$380 value!)

**EXCLUSIVE HOUSE CALL  
REBATES AVAILABLE!**

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

# CONSERVE & \$AVE<sup>®</sup>



INDICIA

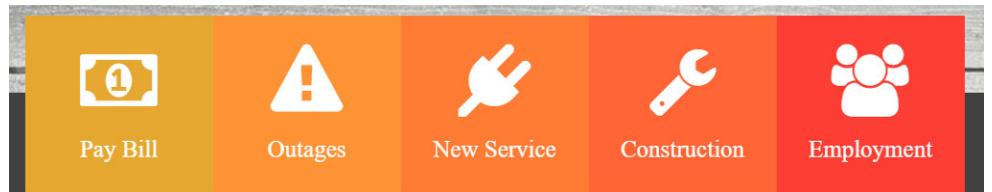
P.O Box 800 208 S. Walnut Ave.  
Owatonna, MN 55060

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

# 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.



## 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

Customers can also see if their address has already been included in a large (over 50) 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.



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.

## Moving?

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

## 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.

