

# CUSTOMER UPDATE



## FEATURING: PROPER TREE PLANTING

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# OPU MEMO



Josh Prokopec,  
Gas/Water Design  
Engineer

## OPU Commission

Mr. Matt Kottke  
Mr. Kent Rossi  
Mr. Randy Doyal  
Ms. Dena Keilman  
Mr. Jay Johnson

During the hot months of summer it's important we are mindful of our water conservation habits.

Here are some easy tips to help reduce water consumption:

- Check all faucets, toilets and showerheads for possible leaks – Have a licensed plumber fix these issues.
- Install a low-flow showerhead - Low flow showerheads deliver fewer gallons per minute of water than conventional showerheads (Low flow showerheads deliver about 1.6 gpm, compared to 5 gpm of conventional heads.) You can also take shorter showers or even take a bath (a partially filled tub uses less water than all but the shortest showers).
- Install a water-saving toilet – This type of toilet uses 1-2 gallons per flush instead of 3-5 gallons.
- Wash your car the efficient way – You can save up to 150 gallons of water every time you wash your car by turning the hose off between rinses.
- Use the dishwasher and washing machine only when they are full – Both appliances use a tremendous amount of water, so it's important to fill it up before starting.
- Turn the faucet off while handwashing dishes – Once all dishes have been scrubbed, turn on the water at that time to rinse off the dirt and soap. This saves a lot of water versus letting the water run.
- Turn the faucet off while you brush your teeth – If everyone followed this habit, the water savings would be tremendous.
- Water your lawn only when it needs it and when you do, deep soak it – Water it long enough to seep down to the roots where it is needed. A light sprinkling that sits on the surface will simply evaporate and be wasted.
- Water during the cool parts of the day – Early morning is better than dusk since it helps prevent the growth of fungus.
- Plant drought resistant trees and plants – Many beautiful trees and plants thrive without irrigation.
- Put a layer of mulch around trees and plants – Mulch slows the evaporation of moisture.

These are just some of the many ways we can all do our part to help reduce water consumption.

Just a couple interesting facts:

- Three-quarters of all indoor water usage is in the bathroom
- In a typical North American home, the toilet accounts for about one-quarter of total water use
- Running a sprinkler for two hours can consume as much as 500 gallons of water

## CONSERVATION TIP\$

Save energy during the summer by using a toaster oven instead of your kitchen oven for smaller dishes. It takes more energy to heat up and keep a full-size oven at temperature than a toaster oven. Not only will you save energy for cooking, but your house won't heat up as much so your air conditioner won't have to work as hard.



# CITY SPOT

HIGHLIGHTING: OWATONNA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

## OWATONNA CITY COUNCIL

*This article is reprinted from the Owatonna Human Rights Commission's Spring 2020 Newsletter at the request of the City of Owatonna in place of their normal article and formatted to fit this page.*

## OWATONNA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

### SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER



### *Respect, Reflect, Include, Invite, Value*

**Galab wanaagsan! Side tahay?** (Good afternoon, how are you?):

Greeting someone in their own native language is a way to instantly break down pre-conceived barriers. Anyone who has traveled to a non-English speaking country can relate. One of the goals of this (OHRC) Newsletter is to share stories of families who have overcome obstacles – often in the face of racism. Sharing insights and experiences is not to generate sympathy but to gain knowledge and compassion. There are many stories to be told – the time is now for Owatonna to embrace diversity and to see all the positive effects diversity has and continues to have in the community.

**What is the Owatonna Human Rights Commission?** - The Owatonna Human Rights Commission (OHRC) is a seven-member advisory commission to the City Council whose mission is to promote cultural diversity by educating the community on issues of discrimination and advising the City Council on Human Rights issues. The commission was formed by the Owatonna City Council in 2000 to, in cooperation with the MN State Department of Human Rights, to secure for all people in Owatonna an equal opportunity in housing, employment, public accommodations, public services, and education, and to work consistently to improve the human relations climate in Owatonna.

**What can we do for you?** The Owatonna Human Rights Commission can (1) help celebrate and educate all Owatonna residents on the rich diversity within Steele County, (2) support the Owatonna Schools human rights/diversity programs for our youth and educators, and (3) refer, assist and report any incident of discrimination or harassment in Owatonna.

**What we have done?** 2019 was a busy year for us. Our activities included cosponsoring the "Better Together" presentations for discussion on creating an inclusive community, sponsoring a presentation on "Building a Community of Dignity and Respect" in collaboration with the Steele County Historical Society, attendance at the "Courageous Community Leaders" training hosted by the Owatonna School District, sponsoring the Martin Luther King Breakfast at the Plaza Morena Campestre Grill and holding two open forums for community comments regarding a disturbance which occurred at the Owatonna High School.

**Owatonna Human Rights Commission Mission Statement:**  
Promoting cultural diversity by educating the community on issues of discrimination and advising the city council on human rights issues.

### MAYOR

Tom Kuntz

### COUNCIL MEMBERS

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

### Helpful Contacts:

Owatonna Human Rights Commission: 507-774-7341 OR [HRC@ci.owatonna.mn.us](mailto:HRC@ci.owatonna.mn.us)

Minnesota Department of Human Rights: 651-296-5663 <https://mn.gov/mdhr/intake/discrimination-helpline.jsp>

Owatonna Police Department:  
507-451-8232

The Commission meets the second Tuesday of the month at 5:30PM in the 2nd floor meeting room of the City Administration Building. 540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060

### Featured stories:

[http://www.southernminngirlfriends.com/pdf/feature/Refugees-Helping-Refugees\\_compressed.pdf](http://www.southernminngirlfriends.com/pdf/feature/Refugees-Helping-Refugees_compressed.pdf)

<https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-s-austin-high-school-has-a-melting-pot-athletics-program/567798502/>

Lest we, as human beings, have forgotten, here are words to remember as a reminder – from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Article 1: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Article 3: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."





## PROPER TREE PLANTING

This article was modified from an article from [safeelectricity.org](https://safeelectricity.org/planting-right-tree-right-place/#:~:text=To%20avoid%20future%20electrical%20hazards,away%20to%20avoid%20future%20pruning). See original article at: <https://safeelectricity.org/planting-right-tree-right-place/#:~:text=To%20avoid%20future%20electrical%20hazards,away%20to%20avoid%20future%20pruning>.

Many people plant trees during the spring and fall. There are many environmental and beautification benefits to planting young trees. However, be aware of utility hazards while planting. Always seek help from professionals when choosing and placing trees and bushes.

Trees that grow too close to power lines can create shock and fire hazards as well as power outages. More importantly, children can become victims of electric shock when they climb trees that have grown too close to the power lines as well. Trees growing into power lines can also create electrical hazards for people who might be trimming branches, hanging lights or otherwise working around them.

Trees provide many aesthetic, environmental, and economic benefits, but take the time to research tree selections and planting locations by consulting your local arborist, tree nursery or utility before buying a tree. These experts can help in designing a beautiful, shade-filled yard with trees appropriate for each area of the landscape. With their help, trees can provide economical cooling in the summer, and a wind-break for harsh winter winds.

In addition, trees help combat the effects of pollution by absorbing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). When trees grow, they take energy from the sun and combine it with CO<sub>2</sub> from the air to photosynthesize. This makes trees a natural "carbon sink" or, a living source of carbon reduction. Some trees are better suited for this task than others and, according to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), tree species that grow quickly and live long are ideal carbon sinks.

Choosing the right tree for the right place is crucial, especially when it comes to power lines. Trees and wood in general can potentially conduct electricity and can create a safety hazard if grown close to electric lines. Power outages or momentary interruptions can occur when branches come into contact with overhead lines. Electrical arcing and sparking from a wire to a nearby branch can also cause fires.

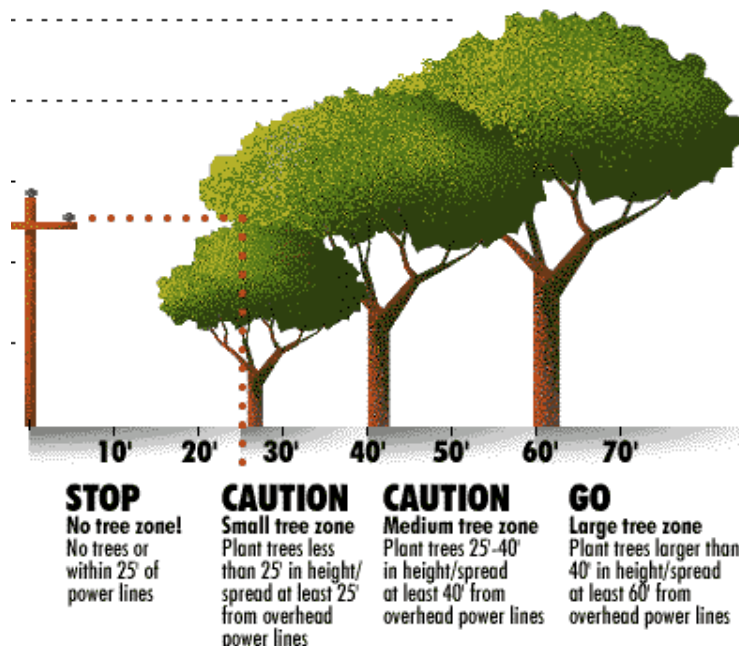
Keep in mind the expected height of the tree as it matures when you purchase trees to plant. A tree that is only 6 feet tall this year could easily grow over 30 feet tall as it matures. Just because it seems far enough away from power lines today doesn't mean it will be when it's full size.

If you have trees that appear to be growing into power lines, contact your electric utility. Never try to prune them yourself. Utilities have or can recommend skilled professionals trained to safely prune and trim trees for electric line clearance.

A good way to think of it is to look up, look down, and look all around for potential hazards. To avoid future utility hazards, safe planting tips to remember include:

- Always call 811 at least 48 hours before digging
- Avoid planting trees within 25 feet of power lines
- Don't plant trees directly over buried utilities
- Plant taller trees further from lines with smaller trees close to overhead
- Do not plant trees near transformers, utility boxes, or utility meters

A little planning now will help avoid hazards and damage in the future. Safe planting!





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# ENERGY HERO



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## DO NOT HANG SIGNS ON POWER POLES

Even though there is equipment to help linemen reach lines on power poles, as long as there are power lines on a pole, there may very well be a need to climb the pole.

Signs (and more importantly the staples used to hang the signs) on power poles present a hazard for our linemen and their flame-retardant clothing. If their clothing gets even a tiny rip while climbing, they could be seriously injured or killed.



## UTILITY SCAMS

### The Scam

Utility phone scams typically involve callers claiming to represent a utility company attempting to trick people into paying them money by threatening to turn off their services. The scammer usually insists the victim pay immediately with a pre-paid debit card (i.e. Green Dot MoneyPak card), which provides them easy access to your money.

### What To Do?

**Hang Up.** If there is any doubt about the authenticity of a caller, hang up and call OPU directly to verify your billing and payment status.

**Report it.** Contact law enforcement and OPU to report theft or attempted theft due to scams.

**Beware.** Never give out personal information, debit/credit card numbers, or wire money as result of an unexpected or unsolicited call.

**Get it in Writing.** Customer will typically be contacted several times via U.S. Mail about past due bills before their service is turned off.

**Know your Options.** OPU provides many options for payment and never REQUIRE the use of a pre-paid debit card.



# WORK ZONE SAFETY

Our utility workers may be your friend, neighbor or family member so we're certain you want them to come home safely each and every evening. We do too! Safety is one of our most important goals at OPU and we take the safety of our employees very seriously. We ask that you do too.

- Expect the Unexpected. Work zones change often. The area you drove yesterday may look different today.
- Avoid Distractions. Distracted driving in a work zone can have deadly consequences. Put down your phone and keep your eyes on the road.
- Pay Attention to Other Drivers. Narrowed traffic patterns provide less ability to maneuver around other vehicles safely. Paying attention can prevent the need for evasive actions in work zones.
- Don't speed or tailgate. Keep a safe distance from the vehicle ahead of you and don't speed. Tailgating and speeding lead to crashes with other vehicles and field workers.
- Obey Road Crews and Signs. Flaggers know how best to move traffic safely in work zones. The warning signs are there to help you and other drivers move safely.
- Be Patient and Stay Calm. Work zone crew members are working to improve the road and make your future driving better. Stay calm and drive safely.

**Remember:** Work zone safety is everybody's responsibility. When you see the orange "Utility Work Ahead" signs, please stay alert, slow down and give our workers a brake!



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
Steele County Public Health

Steele County Public Health would like to thank the residents of Steele County for doing their part in reducing the spread of COVID-19, a novel Coronavirus. This virus is highly contagious and can lead to serious illness, hospitalization, and death. And while some people have no symptoms, they may still be infected with the virus and spread it to other people unknowingly.

As businesses open their doors, it does not mean the risk has passed, rather it is more important to continue the safe practices such as washing your hands, getting tested when sick, social distancing, staying home when able and wearing a mask. Remember COVID-19 is a respiratory virus. Protect yourself and others from the virus by wearing a face mask when it may be difficult to maintain a 6-foot separation between you and others. Face masks can reduce the risk of infection.

None of these things alone offer perfect protection, however, when you do them all together, they are proven to help protect yourself. When WE do these things together, we protect each other! We are all in this together! Please continue to do your part to keep yourself, your loved ones, and our community financially and physically healthy.

More information is available at these web sites:

- **Steele County Public Health**  
[https://www.co.steele.mn.us/divisions/community\\_services/public\\_health/coronavirus\\_\(covid-19\).php](https://www.co.steele.mn.us/divisions/community_services/public_health/coronavirus_(covid-19).php)
- **Minnesota COVID-19 Public Dashboard**  
<https://Mn.gov/covid19>
- **Minnesota Department of Health**  
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html>





# REBATES

## Time for a new cooling system?

Owatonna Public Utilities offers great rebates  
on high efficiency air conditioning equipment!



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

# CONSERVE & \$AVE®

[www.owatonnautilities.com](http://www.owatonnautilities.com) 7



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.smarthub.coop](http://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 629, Owatonna, MN 55060
- ACH bank draft sent directly from your bank

## Moving?

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



**During these trying times, we urge residents to support your locally owned businesses in Steele County. Show them we are all stronger together.**

## STOP THE SPREAD

In a continuing attempt to encourage social distancing and to protect our employees and the residents of Owatonna from the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), public access to OPU buildings will remain restricted until further notice. Our customer service reps are available by phone, during normal business hours, to help answer your questions. Utility payments can be made in a variety of ways that do not require face-to-face interaction. View the different options on the left.

## 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.



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