



OWATONNA
PUBLIC UTILITIES

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CUSTOMER UPDATE

Renewable Natural Gas

What is it & What are its Benefits

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OPU MEMO



Tammy Schmoll,
Executive, Commu-
nications and Administra-
tion Coordinator

OPU Commission

Kent Rossi
Randy Doyal
Jay Johnson
Doug Zirngible
Greg Vetter

There is a lot of chatter in the news, and around the country, regarding electrification, electric vehicles, renewable energy, and bans on natural gas. I heard a quote one time that said, "There are three sides to a story: your side, my side and the truth". Everyone's perspectives are different, and their truths are different based on their life experiences. With every topic, you can find someone opposed to it or someone who supports it; and each of those sides have pros and cons; truths and falsehoods. So how do you navigate through all the noise?

That's a great question. My response...educate yourself...**on all sides of a topic**, and then draw your own conclusion as to what is best for you and your family. Don't have time for that? Please call us. We'll be happy to talk you through it.

At OPU, our core business is based on three commodities: electricity, water and natural gas. So, as you might expect, we support the concept of a diverse energy portfolio. We feel a variety of sources are important, and essential to the future reliability and sustainability of life as we know it.

As I mentioned earlier, there are pros and cons for each of the commodities. For instance, natural gas is the fossil fuel that burns with the lowest emissions and there is an abundance available. However, it is still a carbon-emitting fossil fuel which has been tied to climate change. In our feature article, you can read about how the methane released from biowaste is captured and turned into renewable

natural gas. OPU is partnering with the Wastewater Treatment plant, during their expansion, to capture released methane and put it back into our natural gas distribution system as a renewable gas.

Likewise, on the other side of the spectrum, there is a push towards electrification. While this shies away from burning fossil fuels and turns towards renewable energy sources, the question remains as to where the additional electricity will come from (how will it be produced?) and will our current systems be able to handle the additional load electrification will bring.

Renewable energy sources such as solar and wind are available to us now; however, they are only available during certain times of the day and are based on weather conditions. Energy storage is the the next big-ticket item on everyone's mind. Lots of research and demonstration projects are currently being conducted and eventually utility scale storage units will be common place making the intermittency of renewables less of an issue.

As you can imagine, there is a lot going on in the energy industry. So, our point in this article is, while we promote different programs pertaining to rebating electric equipment, we also have many programs rebating and promoting natural gas equipment. Everything in moderation leads to a well-balanced economy. Our commitment to you is to do our best to provide as many facts as we can regarding energy related topics, whether it be the good, the bad, or the ugly.

CONSERVATION TIP\$

Insulating your hot water pipes can save money on utility bills, reduce the time it takes for hot water to get to the tap, and increase the temperature at the tap by up to 4 degrees, allowing the water heater to be turned down slightly. Insulating exposed pipes is an easy DIY project, too. For safety, make sure to keep insulation at least 6 inches away from the flue ("chimney") on natural gas water heaters.



NATIONAL

NATURAL GAS UTILITY WORKER DAY

March 18, 2024

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO!!



LEFT TO RIGHT (ABOVE):

Josh Prokopec, Jeff Wencil, Dave Fox, Brent Glende, Byron Brady, Joe Bellomy and Jerry Hansen.

LEFT TO RIGHT:

Dan Cammock,
Brian Clausen,
Paden Forester
Jeri Blazek
Craig Hansen
Laurie Sorensen
Caleb Scheel





Renewable Natural Gas

What is it & What are its Benefits

reprinted from an article on the RNG Coalition website, www.rngcoalition.com

WHAT IS RENEWABLE NATURAL GAS AND WHY IS IT SUSTAINABLE?

Renewable Natural Gas (RNG) is, by definition, a clean, affordable and reliable waste-derived fuel that can be used to power homes, businesses and even vehicles.

How does it work? Every community in America produces waste. As that waste breaks down, it emits methane, which is a naturally occurring, but potent and harmful greenhouse gas (GHG).

RNG projects capture this methane from existing food waste, animal manure, wastewater sludge and garbage, and redirect it away from the environment, repurposing it as a clean, green energy source. Made from matter that is already decomposing right under our feet, RNG is the product of pure innovation and ingenuity.

As a storable, replenishable fuel that looks and acts like natural gas, RNG provides a practical, cost-efficient and reliable energy solution – and it is available today! Hundreds of farms, businesses and residents are already using it.

RNG is not only helping slow the impacts of climate change in the near-term, it is also helping to rebuild local economies for the future.

HOW IS RENEWABLE NATURAL GAS BENEFITING OUR TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE GREEN ENERGY SOURCES?

Just like electrification, wind and solar, RNG is an essential piece of the puzzle when it comes to moving away from our dependence on fossil fuels. That said, RNG is unique in that the technology is already here.

To effectively address environmental challenges now, we need a diverse portfolio of solutions and resources that can start working together today and affect measurable change quickly.

RNG is a game changer because it reduces the impacts of organic wastes, while also fueling a greener future. Solid waste is expected to grow nearly 70% by 2050 due to natural human

activity. RNG provides a near-term solution for effectively managing this colossal waste issue and getting us on the path to implementing a source of clean, reliable fuel.

The choice couldn't be more clear – while some other sources of green and renewable energy will require significant infrastructure changes to be implemented, RNG can be used in existing systems and appliances today.

HOW DOES RENEWABLE NATURAL GAS HELP THE AVERAGE PERSON/HOUSEHOLD?

For those hoping to reduce their use of fossil fuels, renewable natural gas is a clean, affordable and reliable option. While many renewable energy alternatives require costly upgrades to your home, RNG acts like conventional natural gas in all heating applications. Therefore local utilities can send it directly to your home without the financial commitment of upgrading or adjusting existing appliances.

During power outages, RNG can also be tapped to provide reliable, sustainable energy. This dependability is also why it is already being used to power essential services for food storage, airports, universities, hospitals and other important facilities.

WHAT DOES RENEWABLE NATURAL GAS HAVE TO DO WITH FARMERS?

Everything. To farmers, RNG is simple – it's about responsible energy ingenuity. RNG is already used by farmers around the world because it provides them with an effective waste management solution, while creating long-term financial and clean-energy assets.

While RNG can be created from a variety of different sources, farmers are in a unique position because the burdensome waste they regularly have to manage – whether it be food waste, crop residue, animal manure or wastewater – can now be recycled into RNG.

continued on next page -->

Sticker Shock?

Why were bills so high in February?

Several factors came into play causing utility bills to be higher in February:

- Colder weather in January was the first reason - Yes, we know it has been unseasonably warm making it easy to forget those few weeks of below zero temperatures. The average temperature from January 13- January 21 was -7 to 7 degrees.
- Most people used their highest amount of natural gas during this time.
- The gas true-up charge (GTC) was higher than previous months. Visit: www.owatonnautilities.com/residential-customers/rates-fees/commodityadjustments/ for more information on the GTC.
- Historically, February statements are often bigger than other months of the year as the usage dates are from January.



Renewable Natural Gas continued from previous page

By embracing RNG, farms can create new revenue streams, not only from efficiently handling naturally occurring waste, but also from the sale of RNG to others. Renewable natural gas production, through anaerobic digestion or “fermentation” of materials, yields valuable by-products for farmers, including more effective fertilizers and even recycled animal bedding, all of which can be used on the farm or sold for additional profit. While RNG is not exclusively useful to farmers, the benefits of renewable natural gas are uniquely geared to benefit their economic futures, our nation’s domestic food sources and farming communities.

RNG is helping farming families continue their legacy of putting food on our tables and sustaining our economy at a time when farming has never been tougher.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF RENEWABLE NATURAL GAS ON THE ECONOMY?

RNG is a proven economic driver and job creator in communities across the country – not just for farmers, but also for local businesses, governments and municipalities.

RNG has experienced unprecedented growth in recent years with hundreds of RNG facilities now operational, under construction or in development. Recent expenditure analysis also shows that most jobs associated with RNG are high paying!

Under a public-private partnership, an RNG facility can result in increased revenue for communities and lower operational costs associated with waste management away from local governments. Moreover, while other green options often involve major, costly structural changes, RNG offers governments, consumers and businesses the ability to utilize current natural gas infrastructure, while shifting to a clean energy alternative.

CAN RNG BE USED TO MAKE RENEWABLE HYDROGEN AND ELECTRICITY?

Yes, RNG can be used to create renewable hydrogen (RH₂) and electricity, providing similar opportunities for farmers and local communities to create clean, storable energy, while reducing waste, decarbonizing and making use of existing infrastructure.

When RH₂ production and electricity production is paired with carbon capture and sequestration, the renewable natural gas (RNG) process is ultimately carbon-negative.

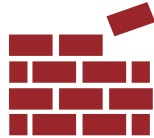
2024 State of the City Address

LOOKING BACK ON 2023



ECONOMIC VITALITY

1,761 new permits issued valued at \$110,530,779 = record-breaking growth!
KAMP Automation relocation = 50 new jobs
Home 2 Suites = 88 new hotel rooms
Climate by Design = 50 new jobs
26th & Cedar Apartments = 75 new apartments
Roma's Italian Eatery & Jersey Mike's opened



INFRASTRUCTURE

Nearly 1 mile of streets reconstructed + 4.78 miles of sealcoated
6,055 linear feet of underground piping lined
\$22 million in state funding for wastewater treatment plant expansion
New airport hangar constructed



QUALITY OF LIFE

20% more rental property inspections completed
18% more fire code inspections completed
Record-setting attendance of 37,295 at River Springs Water Park
8 new indoor pickleball courts
3,000 more rounds sold at Brooktree Golf Course & a new bar area constructed
Police Department increased community-oriented contacts to 4,800



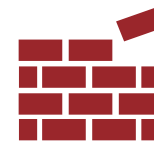
EFFICIENT EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT

New community-wide brand = increased recognizability & community pride
Financial Award for Excellence & bond rating upgrade
City Hall renovations = new Council Chambers, accessible restrooms & community meeting space



ECONOMIC VITALITY

Opening of first mixed-use redevelopment along riverfront
Opening of Westlake Meadows = 276 new apartments
Foamcraft expansion
Opening of Scooters Coffee



INFRASTRUCTURE

Library renovations = new creative resources, podcast equipment, a 3D printer & study spaces
\$5+ million renovations at Merrill Hall
Complete Long Range Asset Plan
Construct new Vine Street parking lot downtown
Construct new 18th Street trail for pedestrian & cyclist safety
Complete more street, utility & maintenance projects
Continue multi-year expansion at Wastewater Treatment Plant



QUALITY OF LIFE

Complete multi-year renovations at Brooktree Golf Course & Clubhouse
Hold Public Library Community Reads series & start planning 125th anniversary celebration in 2025
Purchase LEC building, add one Police Officer & upgrade drone technology
\$1.1 million one-time public safety funding = crime prevention & first responder safety & wellness



EFFICIENT EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT

Redesign Owatonna.gov website
Gather community input through resident survey & engagement platform
Finalize 2050 Comprehensive Plan

For additional information and ongoing updates, please visit [OWATONNA.GOV](https://www.owatonna.gov)

ATTENTION PARENTS AND FAMILIES *of 5th Grade Students*



Owatonna Public Utilities partners with National Energy Foundation to provide Project Conserve & Save to 5th grade students in Owatonna. This year marks the 6th year of Project Conserve & Save!

Project Conserve & Save introduces 5th grade students to energy conservation through a combination of in-class lessons and a take-home conservation kit and worksheet. Kits and Home Energy Worksheets will be going home with students in March. We encourage all families of 5th grade students to talk about energy conservation at home with your child and complete the Home Energy Worksheet, even if you opted out of a kit this year.



We Have New Buddy's

Who did we hire? No, no, they're called Hydrant Buddy's!

A Hydrant Buddy is an ergonomic, cordless drill designed to operate fire hydrants. OPU received a matching safety grant to purchase these tools through the Minnesota DLI/MNOSHA Workplace Safety Consultation Unit. They will not only aid our crew in maintaining our hydrants, they will greatly mitigate shoulder, elbow and back injuries from operating 1,397 hydrants during our yearly watermain flushing program.

In order to keep all hydrants in a fire ready condition, they must be exercised and maintained. Our crew will oil each hydrant and then open it, counting the number of turns it takes to do so. A new fire hydrant requires approximately 17 turns to fully open. As a hydrant ages, this number can decrease, which means it isn't fully opening or closing. Our crew will open and close the hydrant several times to return the hydrant to normal operating condition. This means, each member of our crew turns the hydrant wrench likely in excess of 3,000 turns each day during our hydrant flushing program!

Check out the April newsletter for Spring hydrant flushing information.



SMELL GAS?

GET OUT!

CALL 911



- Smell gas? (odor is like rotten eggs)
- Can't immediately find the source?
- DO NOT turn on a light switch or use the phone because the potential spark could ignite the gas and cause an explosion!
- Get out and call 911 from your mobile phone or a neighbor's house.

Learn more about Gas Safety at
www.OwatonnaUtilities.com

COME VISIT US AT THE KOWZ & KRUE HOME SHOW



NEED HELP PAYING YOUR ENERGY BILLS?

SEMCAC's Energy Assistance Program
may be able to help you with winter
energy bills.

(eligibility is based on household income)

CALL SEMCAC! 800-944-3281

Serving Dodge, Fillmore, Freeborn, Houston, Mower, Steele & Winona Counties.

The Energy Assistance Program is funded by the State of Minnesota Department of Commerce through a block grant from the Federal Health and Human Services Department.



Sometimes we get asked **"Does OPU know if I have a water leak?"**

Well, the answer to that question is tricky. We can only guess. And when we do make a guess, we give you a call. In fact, we make a lotta calls when it comes to potential water leaks.

So, how do we make a guess? It's pretty neat. The systems and software we use to collect readings and send you a bill are what helps us make these kinds of guesses. You could say that pretty solidly falls into the "blessing in disguise" category: The thing that's charging you money is also watching out for you. I'm a "silver lining" kind of person, so I look at it as just another way my water bill is a good investment. Plus, I like having running water.

Anyway, as your readings are rolling in, if your water usage has strangely increased or spiked a lot – it shows up on a report our Meter Shop checks regularly. This makes them think, "Uh oh – somebody might have a leak". The Meter Shop then hops on the phone and starts making calls, sending emails, and even putting out 'door hangers' if they can't get ahold of you. Wanna know how many calls were made last year? The Meter Shop made 658 calls to let customers know they might have a leak. A whopping 588 of those were unique leaks of some kind. We figure it would've resulted in something like 52.5 million gallons of lost water (the rough equivalent of 105 water towers).

So, short of going downstairs and screaming in horror when you see the basement is flooded (been there), what do these leaks end up being?

Leaking toilets are really common, and result in a surprisingly high amount of water loss. Basically, the "running toilet" thing, if your toilet continually makes that hissy, whistly, wooshy, gurgly noise (coincidentally, my spouse has used all of those words to describe my snoring, which reminds me – I need to see a doctor), then your toilet is slowly leaking water (and money) down the drain.

Dripping or leaking fixtures is another one. A drippy faucet, maybe in the shower, maybe a spigot on the outside of the house, maybe a leaking pipe under the sink. Things like that.

A leaking pipe is yet another one. This can be more sinister, because they're not as noticeable as a leak from a fixture in the house. Look for water marks on ceiling, floors, or walls. Foundation cracks might be a sign or maybe a musty smell in an area.



Fix-a-Leak Week

March 18-24

Fixing easily corrected household water leaks can save homeowners about 10 percent on their water bills.



BUSINESS BITES

Owatonna Public Utilities offers commercial boiler rebates for our business customers. With a program designed to meet the needs of a wide range of businesses and building sizes, **how do you know what boiler size is best for your building?**

Boilers can range in size from 100,000 Btuh, to millions of Btuh. Determining the approximate size you need is impacted by several variables including building square footage, ceiling height, number and types of windows, insulation quality, and boiler efficiency. **Work with a heating professional to figure out the exact size you need.** If you currently have a boiler, you can get an idea of its size by looking at the capacity plate.

If the capacity plate is unreadable, here is a guideline to help determine the approximate size you may need. (Be sure to include all floors in a multi-floor building.)

- 2,500 Sq Ft: 100,000 – 125,000 Btuh*
- 5,000 Sq Ft: 200,000 – 250,000 Btuh*
- 10,000 Sq Ft: 400,000 – 500,000 Btuh*
- 20,000 Sq Ft: 800,000 – 1,000,000 Btuh*
- 40,000 Sq Ft: 1,500,000 – 2,000,000 Btuh*

* Boiler sizes are only for approximation. Please do not rely on these estimations to purchase a boiler. Always have a qualified contractor determine the exact boiler size needed for your building.



Shower Yourself With Savings

Don't let your money go down the drain– take advantage of our WaterSense showerhead rebate today and start showering smarter! With a new WaterSense efficient showerhead, you'll be able to make a splash with your water savings.

Install an efficient WaterSense® Showerhead and get a \$25 rebate. To apply, download a WaterSense Showerhead Rebate Application at www.OwatonnaUtilities.com.



Word Search

CONSERVE & SAVE™

**Reservoir
Bathroom
Water
Steam
Efficient
Rebate
Bathe
Shower
Conserve
Save
Savings
Splash**

E V L S Q Y R X Q S U D J C E
D I R H R D U O G P T F R D F
I P W O Y R V B U Y B E I W T
W V O W F B E X A J B E A M E
S U Y E H Q D B E T L Z D M U
A S A R C S U E A S H L R C S
V C X E Z J H M Y T Z R I T A
I R E S E R V O I R E C O N V
N N I S W A T E R W P M D O E
G O E F F I C I E N T A A Y M
S W Y J M J I A E J X V J K K
O D S M D F A R X T B A T H E
A M S N R C O N S E R V E P K
I J A N P O J F V N O N W W N
A J F H G M O X S P L A S H M

Commercial Customers

Install a low-flow pre-rinse spray valve and get up to 50% of the installed cost back (natural gas customers), or get a \$10 rebate per fixture (water-only customers).



Replacing one old, inefficient pre-rinse spray valve with a water-efficient model will save enough water to wash 4,800 racks of dishes in a typical kitchen!

To apply for a pre-rinse spray valve rebate, download a Commercial Food Service Equipment Rebate Application at www.OwatonnaUtilities.com.





INDICIA

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

Gas/Water Serviceworker

National salary range
\$52,000- \$125,000



Scan to watch
Employee Interview

Job description: Performs a wide variety of gas and water construction, operation and maintenance tasks. Operates equipment. Responds to customer requests for service. Safety restores gas and water service to customers. Performs general maintenance of buildings, grounds and facilities including carpentry, masonry, snow removal and repairs.

Education Requirements:

Associate/Technical
Degree in a Gas or
Water Maintenance
Program

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.



WWW.OWATONNAUTILITIES.COM