



OWATONNA
PUBLIC UTILITIES

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CUSTOMER UPDATE

DRONES AND ELECTRIC LINES



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OPU MEMO



Roger Warehime,
General Manager

OPU Commission

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

The focus of our newsletter this month is safety. If you know OPU, you know that safety is one of our core values. We work diligently to keep safety top-of-mind in all that we do, and it is a company-wide expectation that we “never compromise safety”. In everything we do, we consider safety for ourselves, our families, and our community.

We spend much time and resources training our employees to identify and mitigate hazards on the job site. Some typical hazards our crews face are high voltages, heights, trench cave-ins, and overhead equipment. However, one of the biggest hazards they face has four wheels and two hands: a distracted driver.

Texting while driving has been illegal in Minnesota since 2008, and using a hand-held phone while driving has been illegal since 2019. If you injure or kill someone, under Minnesota’s “hands-free law”, you can face a felony charge of criminal vehicular operation or homicide. Still, in 2020, distracted driving contributed to 2,612 injuries and 29 deaths in Minnesota. Distracted driving contributes to 11 percent of crashes in Minnesota.

So what is distracted driving, exactly? Distracted driving is any visual or auditory activity that can divert your attention away from the primary task of driving. Texting and talking on your cell phone are the most obvious distractions, but other distracted behaviors include eating and drinking, talking to passengers, grooming, adjusting a radio or music player, and using a navigation system.

It turns out that our brains just really aren’t that good at focusing on more than one thing at a time. Driving while using a cell phone reduces the amount of brain activity associated with driving by 37%. Hands-free is certainly not risk-free. Some sources state that hands-free cellphone use is just as dangerous as hand-held use. The National Safety Council states that drivers using hands-free technology have a tendency to “look at” but not “see”. They estimate that drivers using cell phones look at but fail to see up to 50 percent of the information in their driving environment.

Here are a few tips for taking action against distracted driving:

- Put your phone away when driving so that you are not tempted to use it.
- Pull over and park in a safe location if a call or text is absolutely necessary.
- Turn on the feature on your phone that blocks texts and calls while you are driving, and sends a response to the caller informing them that you are driving.
- Have passengers manage your phone for you.
- Prepare before you drive. Review maps, adjust your radio, eat and make any phone calls needed before you drive.
- Request phone-free driving when you are a passenger.
- Model safe driving behavior.

Have a wonderful summer, keep these tips in mind, and keep an eye out for our crews as you are driving around town! Thank you.

CONSERVATION TIP\$

Avoid setting your thermostat at a colder setting than normal when you first turn on your air conditioner. It will not cool your home any faster and could result in excessive cooling and unnecessary expense. For more energy saving tips visit:

<https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/spring-and-summer-energy-saving-tips>



Be a Good Neighbor

Good neighbors help make great neighborhoods. Good neighbors watch out for each other and care about the safety and the appearance of their neighborhood. Taking the time to establish good terms with your neighbors has numerous benefits.

The City of Owatonna has passed codes and ordinances that ensure all properties are safe and maintained. Here are some of the ordinances that you should be aware of that help you be a good neighbor.

- Mow your lawn regularly to keep it under the height restrictions – 8” for lots that have been built upon (including boulevards) and 18” for vacant lots. (City Code § 93.061)
- Do your part by weeding and spraying regularly to control weeds on your property so they don’t spread to your neighbor’s yard. The MN Department of Agriculture maintains a list of noxious weeds that are prohibited. You can find more information about them on their website: www.mda.state.mn.us. (City Code § 93.002; Minn. Stat. § 18.77 and 21.72)
- Know the rules for recreational fires and follow them. Put your fire where the smoke will least likely blow onto your neighbor’s property. Recreational fires must be no larger than 3’ in diameter, 2’ in height and must be contained within a pit or device designed for such use. Keep it at least 25’ from buildings or combustible materials. Only unpainted and untreated wood, coal, or charcoal may be burned. You must always be present when a fire is going and remember to keep something close by to put it out, such as a garden hose or pail of water. (City Code § 93.043)
- Keep your household trash in a container designed for such use, ensuring that it doesn’t leak and that it is always covered. Containers should be stored in the side or rear yard, or in your garage. Only put them out by the street on designated pickup days. Make sure you have regular pickup service. (City Code § 117.09)
- Your personal property should be stored within a building or fully screened so as not to be visible from adjoining properties and public streets. If you have wood for a wood burning stove or recreational fires, make sure that it is stacked in a neat pile. (City Code § 157.044)
- Don’t place unwanted items, such as furniture or appliances, on the right-of-way or in your yard. Disused or discarded items stored outside in violation of city ordinances are considered refuse or junk and should be disposed of promptly. (City Code § 93.004 and § 157.043)
- Maintain the buildings on your property to prevent them from becoming an eyesore in the neighborhood and to preserve the value of your property. The Minimum Housing Code was established to ensure that buildings within Owatonna are maintained to specific standards. More information can be found on the City of Owatonna website, ci.owatonna.mn.us, in the “City Code” section. (City Code § 151)

Above all, touch base with your neighbors regularly and keep them in the loop. If you are planning to do something that may affect them, minimize it and let them know in advance. Keep the channels of communication open by reminding them that if you’re doing anything which bothers them, they should talk to you about it and that you will do the same if you have an issue with them. Being on bad terms with your neighbor can make your life frustrating, day after day. Most people want to be good neighbors and are willing to correct problems promptly. If they don’t, you can report the problem to the fire department, and we will do what we can to have the problem corrected.

MAYOR

Tom Kuntz

COUNCIL MEMBERS

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Brent Svenby

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Drones Pose Electrical Safety Issues

Information for this article obtained from the Indiana Electric Cooperatives www.indianaec.org

The use of drones has increased rapidly in the past several years. Coming in various sizes ranging from hummingbird to bald eagle, these remote-controlled aircraft are being used in a vast number of ways by government, industries, commercial enterprises and hobbyists.

Electric utilities have come to rely on drones to help inspect power lines, including during storm restoration work when it might be difficult to access certain areas. While drones have not yet filled the skies, as many predict they one day will, both hobbyists and commercial users should be aware of dangers when operating the little aerial devices near power lines and electrical equipment.

“Some of the same things we learned about flying kites as kids carry over to drones, too,” said John Gasstrom, CEO of Indiana Electric Cooperatives. “While drones are not tethered to you with a string like a kite that can fall across overhead power lines and put you in direct contact with electricity, drones still present safety concerns their pilots need to consider.”

Some things drone operators, both commercial and recreational, should keep in mind include:

- Keep drones at least 100-150 feet away from power lines, electrical substations and other electrical equipment. Power lines can interfere with the radio signals to your drone causing it to veer off course or crash. This can pose danger to any people below or damage your drone or the power lines.
- Should your drone get caught in power lines or crash into a utility pole or substation, never attempt to retrieve it yourself. Attempting to free the drone by entering a substation is not only criminal trespassing, you can be electrocuted. Call your electric utility for assistance.

- If you are in an unfamiliar area or don't know the name of the utility, most poles and all substations are marked with the utility's name and may have an emergency phone number. If you still are unable to contact the utility, call 911 and ask for assistance. Depending on where your drone has landed, it could cause a power outage or damage to the electrical equipment.

CONSIDERING PURCHASING A DRONE AND BECOMING A RECREATIONAL PILOT?

Here are some quick tips and facts from the Federal Aviation Administration website you'll need to understand as you get started:

- Fly only for recreational purposes.
- Keep your unmanned aircraft within your visual line-of-sight or within the visual line-of-sight of a visual observer who is co-located and in direct communication with you.
- Do not fly above 400 feet above the ground.
- Never fly near airports.
- Do not fly in controlled airspace without an FAA authorization.
- Follow all FAA airspace restrictions, including special security instructions and temporary flight restrictions.
- Never fly near other aircraft.
- Always give way to all other aircraft. You are responsible for knowing your drone's altitude and location.
- Never fly over groups of people, public events or stadiums full of people.
- Never fly near emergency response activities.
- Never fly under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Take and pass an aeronautical knowledge and safety test and maintain proof of test passage to be made available to the FAA or law enforcement upon request.

For full details of becoming a drone pilot, visit faa.gov/uas.

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!

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.



**CALL
BEFORE
YOU DIG**

**DIYer by
day and
streamer
at night?**



Stay safe during social distancing by calling 811 before starting any new project, so you can stay connected to the internet and utility services you rely on.

**Call 811 or go
to your state 811
center's website
before digging.**



Call811.com/811-your-state



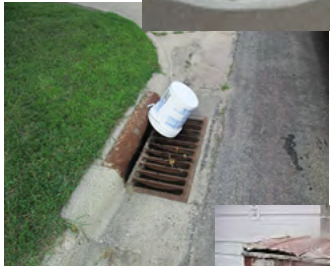
Water Quality and Responsible Business Ownership

Grease, oils, detergents, trash, lawn waste, and other pollutants from operations have the potential to enter the stormwater system and ultimately a nearby body of water.

Simple measures can be implemented at your place of business to ensure operations do not negatively affect your community's water resources.

1. Routinely check dumpsters, storage areas, and grease containers for leaks or overflow.
2. Sweep your parking lots and sidewalks often. Make sure to remove trash, especially debris that has accumulated in snow piles over winter.
3. If you have a private stormwater treatment system onsite (thumbs up!), make sure you are performing routine inspections and maintenance.
4. If you do not have a stormwater treatment system, consider constructing one.
5. Ensure your business has adequate spill kits and a spill response plan.
6. Check your equipment and vehicles for leaks.
7. Make sure people responsible for property maintenance collect grass, leaves, and debris from hard surfaces.
8. Avoid dumping anything, including wash water, down catch basins. Only rain down the drain!
9. Remember: Anything exposed to weather can become a stormwater pollutant.

Schedule a site visit to discuss possible preventative measures at your location! Learn more about our Stormwater Program at ci.owatonna.mn.us/stormwater or contact Brad Rademacher, Stormwater/Water Quality Specialist at 507-774-7300 or stormwater@ci.owatonna.mn.us.



A photograph of a person with dark hair and goggles floating on a pink inflatable ring in a swimming pool. The person is looking up and to the side. The water is blue and rippled. The inflatable ring has a cartoonish face on it.

**Need a little
help staying
cool this
summer?**

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

Visit www.owatonnautilities.com to learn more and download rebate applications with complete terms and conditions.

CONSERVE & \$AVE[®]



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

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
- ACH bank draft sent directly from your bank

Moving?

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



2020 CONSUMER CONFIDENCE REPORT

City of Owatonna, PWSID 1740007

In a continuing “**Go Green**”, effort, a 2020 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 water 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.

Gas Leak?

If you smell gas and can't find the source immediately, go to a neighbor's house and call OPU at 451-2480 option 1.

Don't turn electrical switches on or off or use a flashlight or cell phone in the home, because an electrical spark could ignite the gas and cause an explosion.

