



**OWATONNA**  
**PUBLIC UTILITIES**

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# CUSTOMER UPDATE



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# OPU MEMO



Roger Warehime,  
Director, Field Operations

## OPU Commission

Mr. Kim Cosens  
Mr. Dale E. Simon  
Mr. Matt Kottke  
Mr. Kent Rossi  
Mr. Randy Doyal

I write this memo just one day after the largest electric outage experienced by OPU within (at least) the last 45 years. The “September 2018 Windstorm” will become part of our shared history to be remembered and talked about alongside the “May 2012 Snowstorm” and the “September 2010 Flood”.

For this most recent entry into our history books, I had the opportunity to serve as our Incident Commander for the entire restoration event. I am extremely proud of our entire team. With mutual aid crews from Blooming Prairie, Saint James, Austin, Rochester, and Shakopee we more than tripled the size of our line crew. Within a 100 hour period of time, the crews completed the equivalent of five weeks of work. And we did it without a single injury!

We also had a large group of people working behind the scenes to make sure that our crews were able to work as efficiently, quickly, and safely as possible. These people worked on many critical tasks including walking through backyards to gather information about the extent of the damage, analyzing the data to prioritize the work, organizing logistics for food and lodging for the visiting crews, communicating with our customers through social media and phone conversations, and procuring materials required to make repairs.

We really appreciated all of the positive comments and recognition we received from our fellow citizens. As we always do after large events, we will be conducting “lessons-learned” sessions over the next couple weeks to identify and implement items that will allow us to do an even better job in the future. It was these lessons learned sessions we conducted in the past, along with numerous mock-drills and table-top scenarios that prepared us to respond. In our business, it is not a matter of IF another disaster will occur, but WHEN.

During the event a few people questioned why they did not have power while their neighbors did. A few also questioned why the high school football field received power before many of the surrounding homes. Therefore, I want to explain how we prioritize outage restoration. Although we were happy that homecoming was able to proceed (and especially happy that the Huskies won), we didn’t do anything extraordinary or beyond normal prioritization to bring power to the football field.

Always our goal is to safely restore power to the most customers in the shortest amount of time. Generally, this means making repairs following the path that electricity takes from the substations to the customer: 1) main feeders, 2) lateral primary lines, 3) secondary lines and transformers affecting multiple customers, 4) individual service lines. When it is anticipated that repairs will take a long time, we will often “isolate” the damaged area by disconnecting it from the rest of the system so that electricity can follow a different path through undamaged lines to power as many customers as we can while repairs are made. This was the case in the area around the high school.

In addition to conducting lessons-learned sessions, we have a number of strategic initiatives already underway that will mitigate damage in future disasters and improve our ability to respond quickly. Next year we will install our Outage Management System which will automate many of the tasks involved in reporting, analyzing, and communicating the specifics of an outage. In 2020 we will begin switching out meters for our AMI (Advanced Metering Infrastructure). AMI will allow us to know the status of each individual meter; we will know that you don’t have power before you do! Finally, our project to convert back yard overhead lines to underground will make the damage from future storms less severe.

Thank you for your support!



### “Look. Listen. Learn.” What does that mean?

Today’s home fires burn faster than ever. In a typical home fire, you may have as little as one to two minutes to escape safely from the time the smoke alarm sounds. Knowing how to use that time wisely takes planning and practice.

The Owatonna Fire Department is teaming up with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) -- the official sponsor of Fire Prevention Week™ for more than 90 years -- to promote this year’s Fire Prevention Week campaign, “Look. Listen. Learn. Be aware. Fire can happen anywhere™,” which works to educate people about basic but essential ways to quickly and safely escape a home fire.

NFPA statistics show that the number of U.S. home fires has been steadily declining over the past few decades. However, the death rate per 1000 home fires that are reported to fire departments was 10 percent higher in 2016 than in 1980.

Although people feel safest in their home, it is also the place people are at greatest risk to fire, with four out of five U.S. fire deaths occurring at home. That over-confidence contributes to a complacency toward home escape planning and practice.

People often make choices in fire situations that jeopardize their safety or even cost them their lives. The Owatonna Fire Department is committed to doing a better job of teaching people about the potentially life-saving difference escape planning and practice can make and motivating them to action.

This year’s “Look. Listen. Learn.” campaign highlights three steps you can take to help quickly and safely escape a fire:

- **Look** for places fire could start.
- **Listen** for the sound of the smoke alarm.
- **Learn** 2 ways out of every room.

While NFPA and the Owatonna Fire Department are focusing on home fires, these fire safety messages apply to virtually anywhere. Situational awareness is a skill you need to use wherever you go. No matter where you are, look for available exits. If the alarm system sounds, take it seriously and exit the building immediately.

For more information about Fire Prevention Week and home escape planning, visit [www.firepreventionweek.org](http://www.firepreventionweek.org).

### MAYOR

Tom Kuntz

### COUNCIL MEMBERS

David Burbank

Nathan Dotson

Jeff Okerberg

Kevin Raney

Greg Schultz

Brent Svenby

Doug Voss



## MUTUAL AID

*Information for this article provided by Minnesota Municipal Power Agency; Front cover picture features OPU crew members working with Shakopee Public Utilities Commission crew members. Above picture is the trucks getting ready to head out for the day.*

Local and state governments share the responsibility for protecting their citizens from disasters, and helping them recover when disaster strikes. In some cases, damage is such that a local government needs help to quickly restore essential services.

Municipal utilities have a long history of helping each other recover from natural disasters. Minnesota municipal utilities responded heroically to help St. Peter recover from a devastating tornado and East Grand Forks from an overwhelming flood. When other Minnesota municipals were hit with ice storms or tornadoes, these utilities were first in line to return the help.

This willingness to help another utility in need became more formalized in the year 2000, when the Federal Emergency Management Agency ceased to reimburse aiding utilities following declaration of a disaster, unless the utilities had existing mutual aid agreements in place.

In response, municipal electric and rural cooperative utilities across the country signed identical mutual aid agreements. The agreement does not obligate a utility to respond. But if it does, it makes it eligible for federal disaster assistance funds, and sets up a framework to cover a host of issues.

Utilities, however, respond before any disaster declaration. That is simply what they do.

Public Power nationally has responded quickly and efficiently to several high-profile disasters. Minnesota municipal crews earned high praise for their work in the wake of hurricanes Sandy and Irma. (Regional utilities were able to handle the damage from Florence.)

Municipal utilities are generally small compared to other utilities, but with 2,000 locally-owned Public Power utilities across the country, we form a strong network. Public power personnel are tied in to FEMA and state emergency command centers, and are in close communication on a state and local basis.

When disaster strikes, Public Power responds quickly, and with a clear purpose. We extend our heartfelt thanks to those utilities that responded so well and so recently in Owatonna.

Shown below are crews from Austin Utilities, Owatonna Public Utilities, Rochester Public Utilities and Shakopee Public Utilities Commission working on putting up new poles that were blown over during a September 20, 2018 storm.



# EQUIPMENT SERIES

## OPU HIGHLIGHT



### No Ordinary Van

To insure accuracy in natural gas measurement, the meters are tested on a regular basis. For large volume commercial meters, this used to mean outsourcing the service to a private testing company. Enter the Roots Master Meter Prover Model 5M/20. Housed in the van shown in the accompanying photo, OPU technicians can now take the testing equipment to the customer site. The meter is then

tested without having to remove it from the piping. Air is pulled in through the customer's meter and volume is compared that registered on the test meter. Meters are tested at 100%, 50% and 10% of rated capacity. Accuracy must be better than 1/2%. Routine maintenance such as changing the meter oil and cleaning the filter is performed at the same time. Natural gas is bypassed around the meter during this process so that the customer has a continuous supply of gas.

At a cost slightly over \$50,000, the equipment doesn't come cheap, but the process is more cost effective than previous methods. When testing is completed, the equipment is removed from the van, allowing it to be used for other technician duties.

### AUTOMATED CREDIT CARD PAYMENT SYSTEM

The security of customer credit card information is very important to us. Beginning October 1, 2018 customers wishing to make a credit card payment over the phone will be transferred to a third party automated service. This process change is important in protecting customer credit card information. It also allows us to be compliant with credit card industry standards. Customers wishing to make their credit card payments by phone will have access to this system 24 hours a day by calling 1-888-228-2398. Customers can still make credit card payments in the office or on-line.

## NEW WEB PORTAL: SMARTHUB

Beginning October 1, 2018 customers wishing to view/pay their bills on-line can create a new account in SmartHub. We regret previous log-in information is not able to be transferred.

Click on the "Pay Bill" button on our website or go to [owatonnautilities.smarthub.coop](http://owatonnautilities.smarthub.coop). When the SmartHub screen appears, click the New User link. The New User Registration window will appear (see image below). You will need your **NEW** billing account number. Your new billing account number is on your statement you will receive in October, or you may call customer service for it.

Customers not wanting to register for SmartHub have the option to make a one time payment using the "Pay Now" feature.

SmartHub also allows users with multiple accounts to view and pay them at the same time.

Please contact customer service with any questions.

To register as a new user, please enter the following information.

Billing Account Number

Last Name or Business

E-mail Address

Confirm E-mail Address

Submit

Cancel

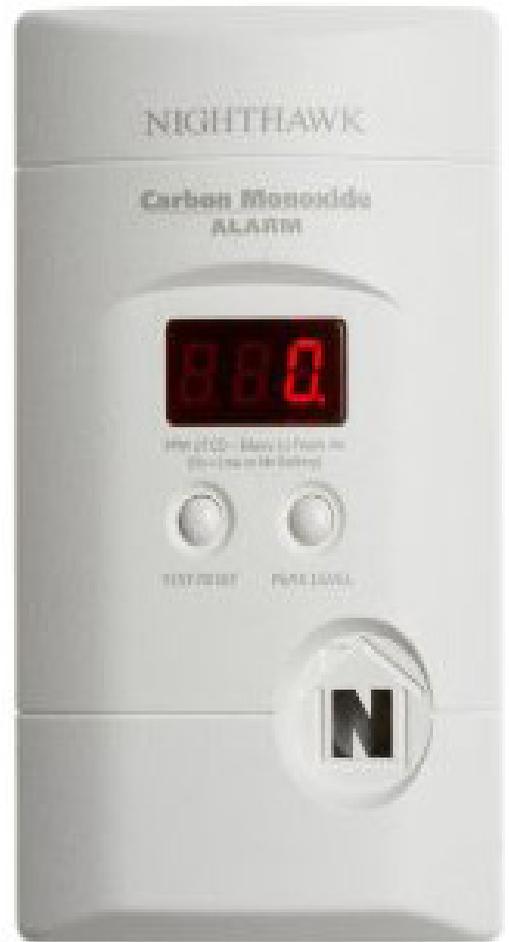
# CARBON MONOXIDE

Getting to know your carbon monoxide (CO) detector can mean the difference between knowing when to replace your batteries, when to replace your detector, or when to get out of your house.

Your CO detector will start beeping when its batteries are low and require replacing. This alarm is different than the alarm that sounds when it detects dangerous levels of CO. It is recommended that you replace the CO detector battery once a year, or more frequently if the low battery alarm sounds.

New CO detectors also have an end of life alarm. Although many manufacturers already included it, the law required it starting in 2009. This alarm will be different than the low battery alarm and will not go away with fresh batteries. Most CO detectors have a 10-year life and should be replaced at this time.

Each CO detector's alerts may be slightly different. Please take a minute to learn what your CO detector's alarms mean. According to the manufacturer Kidde, the alarms your detector uses are commonly printed on the back of your detector. Getting to know these alerts will help you to identify when the alarm is actually detecting CO in your home or business. Remember, if anyone is showing signs and symptoms of CO poisoning including drowsiness, headache, or nausea, get out and call Owatonna Public Utilities!



## Scoop the Poop!

Stepping in dog waste can be a disgusting experience. Even worse is knowledge that pet waste may be polluting our drinking water and local recreational areas. When rain and snowmelt flows across the land it carries pet waste to storm drains, which eventually flow into a lake or stream. This poses an unnecessary public health and environmental risk. If you think picking up dog waste is unpleasant, try swimming in it.

**Did You Know:** One day's waste from a large dog can contain as much as 7 Billion Fecal Coliform Bacteria!

Scooping your pet waste isn't just a courtesy for those walking behind you; it also keeps our water resources safe. Here are a few tips on how owners can protect local water and recreation areas:

- Always bring a disposal bag with you when you walk your dog
- Make sure to place the bag in a proper receptacle
- Routinely clean your yard, boulevard, and paved surfaces

## Take time and properly dispose of your pet's waste!

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



# LED Light Bulbs

ON  
SALE  
NOW

*Reduced pricing through December while supplies last at these participating retailers:*



**Alexander Lumber Co.**  
**Arrow Ace Hardware**  
**Batteries + Bulbs**  
**Mills Fleet Farm    Walmart**



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

**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.

Bills can pile up just like snow. But a Minnesota state law called the "Cold Weather Rule" is designed to protect people who have trouble paying their utility bills in winter. The Cold Weather Rule applies from October 15 to April 15. It says that utility service affecting your home's primary source of heat must not be disconnected and must be reconnected during this period if you meet all of the following requirements:

1. Your total household income is less than 50 percent of the state median household income, **and**
2. You enter into a payment agreement with your utility that considers the financial resources of your household, and you continue to make reasonably timely payments under that agreement.

If you are concerned about being able to pay your utility bill, please contact OPU at 507-451-2480. We can provide you with referrals to local energy assistance providers. If you know you're going to have trouble paying your utility bills, please contact us to work out a payment agreement.



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.

## 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).

# MINNESOTA COLD WEATHER RULE

Do you qualify?

## 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.

