



**OWATONNA**  
**PUBLIC UTILITIES**

VOLUME 30 | ISSUE #10  
OCTOBER 2020

# CUSTOMER UPDATE



Know what's below.  
Call 811 before you dig.

## FEATURING: NATURAL GAS SAFETY

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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

Earlier this year, we talked about a project to upgrade our metering equipment. The original project was due to kick off in July, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was delayed a few months.

We are please to announce the first phase of the project is ready to kick off on Monday, October 12, 2020. Natural gas metering equipment is the first equipment being upgraded. The second phase of the project will include water metering equipment and the third, and final stage, will be the electric metering equipment.

Customers should receive a notification approximately 2 weeks prior to when the installers will be in your neighborhood. A copy of the postcard notification is displayed below. SCOPE Services, Inc. is the company contracted to do the equipment change out. For the first phase of the project, you do not need to be home for the equipment to be changed out. A door hanger will be left to indicate if the installation was successful or if an appointment will need to be made. Samples of those notices are also shown below.

Visit our website at <https://www.owatonnautilities.com/residential-customers/ami-frequently-asked-questions/> to get answers to the majority of your questions.



### OPU's Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) Project has begun!

In the next two weeks, Owatonna Public Utilities will begin installing new equipment for its Advanced Meter Infrastructure (AMI) project **in your neighborhood**.



SCOPE Services – our program partners – will be installing your new equipment. SCOPE personnel will have an ID card for verifying their identity at all times, and the SCOPE logo will be on the side of their vehicles. SCOPE personnel will adhere to strict COVID-19 guidelines, ensuring that appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is worn at all times.

**If your gas meter is obstructed by a locked fence, physical structure or an animal is present – you will need to make an appointment for SCOPE Services to install equipment on your gas meter.** If not, you do not need to be present for the installation.

**For questions about this equipment change or to make an appointment:**

**Please call SCOPE Services toll-free at 844-487-7266**

Monday–Friday: 7am – 7pm CST  
Saturday: 7am – 4pm CST

For more information about OPU's Advanced Meter Infrastructure (AMI) project, please visit us at:  
[www.owatonnautilities.com](http://www.owatonnautilities.com)



#### Installation complete!

We have successfully installed your new equipment.

If you have any questions or concerns about your equipment installation, please contact SCOPE Services at 844-487-7266.

For more information about OPU's Advanced Meter Infrastructure (AMI) project, please visit us at:

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



#### We were unable to install your equipment.

We attempted to install new equipment at your location, but we were unsuccessful.

Please call SCOPE Services as soon as possible to schedule a time when we can access your meter.

Please contact SCOPE Services at 844-487-7266.

For more information about OPU's Advanced Meter Infrastructure (AMI) project, please visit us at:

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



## CONSERVATION TIP\$

Blinds reduce heat loss through windows by acting as another layer of insulation. As the temperature falls, open blinds during the day to let the sun help heat your home but make sure to close them as the sun goes down.



## Fire Safety this Holiday Season

The Holidays are right around the corner. I know a lot of us are looking forward to this time of year and starting fresh in 2021. However, before we get to these holidays, we want to celebrate Fire Prevention Week with you! October 4th – 10th is fire prevention week and the Owatonna Fire Department wants to share some fire safety tips for you and your family. Did you know the leading cause of house fires is cooking fires? The NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) released that during 2014 – 2018 cooking was the leading cause of reported home fires and fire injuries and the second leading cause of fire death in the United States. With this information, the NFPA came up with the theme “Serve up Fire Safety in the Kitchen”. No matter your age, we can all use some reminders and tips to follow while cooking to avoid fires, injuries or death. Below are some cooking tips along with other fire safety tips to remember this holiday season.



### Cooking/Kitchen Safety –

- Stay focused on the food. Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home kitchen fires. Do not leave the kitchen while cooking. If you absolutely must leave, turn off the burner!
- Put a lid on it. Always keep a lid nearby when cooking. If a small grease fire starts, put the lid on the pot/pan to help suffocate the flame. Turn the burner off and slide pan over to a burner that was not on. You can also sprinkle baking soda on a small grease fire. **NOTE:** Only do these actions if you are safely able to. If the fire is too big, get out and call 9-1-1.
- Keep any flammable products, children and pets 3 feet away from stove to prevent anything from catching fire and prevent any burns.
- Have a working fire extinguisher near\* the kitchen.
- If there is a fire in the oven, turn oven off and keep door closed. This will help suffocate any fire inside.
- If deep-frying a turkey, remember not to do this on the deck. Place deep fryer in middle of driveway or open area and do not over fill fryer with oil.



### Other Holiday Fire Safety-

- Check all your smoke alarms and CO alarms. Replace batteries in alarms that do not work. (Note: Smoke alarms have a life of 10 years and CO alarms have a life of 7 years. Replace alarms that are old)
- Use battery operated candles. Children's costumes, dried leaves, cornstalks, and paper decorations can catch fire easily on Halloween.
- Follow manufacturers' instructions on Holiday lights. Replace broken bulbs or strings of lights that are old and worn out.
- Space heaters – Heating is the second leading cause of U.S home fires. December, January and February are peak months for heating fires. If you have a space heater, keep all flammable materials away from it.

Unfortunately, the Fire Department is unable to visit schools this year for Fire Prevention Week due to COVID-19 but that does not mean we are not spreading the word about fire safety. Check us out on Facebook, Instagram or our website for links to activities and games to play with your children and help them understand the importance of fire safety.

*The Owatonna Fire Department members want to wish you and your family a happy and safe holiday season!*

## Youth Activity Scholarship Fund

This is a local, independently funded Activity Scholarship, that helps children, ages 4 - 14 yrs of age, and families in need, who couldn't afford to participate in one of the 20+ programs offered by the Owatonna Park and Recreation Department or Kids First.

In 2019 the fund helped over 700 requests from families who couldn't afford the full registration fee to participate in many of the programs offered. The Scholarship pays a portion of the fee and the Child/Family pays the remainder.

This is all done in a confidential process and within certain guidelines, but the main purpose is to get ALL kids active and playing together.

Can you please help the Kids? The need is greater than ever. To donate to the 501(c)(3) fund, contact the P&R Dept Office at 507-444-4321 with your Debit or Credit Card Today.

To learn more go to <http://ci.owatonna.mn.us/parksrecreation> and bring up scholarships.





**GSOC**  
GOPHER STATE ONE CALL



## NATURAL GAS SAFETY

Natural gas is an extremely important natural resource in the United States. It is one of the most common fuels used to heat houses and businesses. It is being used more widely in electric generation to replace coal and it powers industry, including some transportation. It is a safe and reliable fuel source but, as with all fuels, it is not without risk. Because there are risks, Utilities spend a great deal of time and effort educating their communities about these risks and how to reduce natural gas usage. This safety education is broken down into four major categories: pipeline location, carbon monoxide poisoning, natural gas smell and leak detection. Gas meter safety is also covered.

Looking first at pipeline location, this safety education focuses on ensuring the public understands there is a vast network of pipelines, gas mains, and gas service lines buried below ground. As with anything buried below ground, gas lines can be out of sight and out of mind, making it easy to accidentally damage one if they are not properly located. Digging a hole isn't the only way a buried gas line can be damaged; driving fence posts, screwing in dog anchors, or anything else that goes into the ground has the potential to damage gas lines and cause a leak. Even if someone thinks they know where all the buried utilities are, it's important to mark the area where the ground will be disturbed with white paint or flags then call 811 at least 48 hours before digging to have buried utilities properly located.

Another safety concern about the use of natural gas is carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. When natural gas equipment is not properly vented or when the burners get dirty, CO is created. It has no smell, no color, and no taste making it difficult to detect. A properly functioning CO Detector and an understanding of CO poisoning symptoms are the most effective ways to be alerted to a problem. Symptoms may

include headache, dizziness, nausea, confusion, and/or loss of consciousness. CO poisoning can be fatal. If your CO alarm goes off or you feel you have these symptoms it's important to move to fresh air and call 911 immediately.

Natural gas by itself does not have a smell, taste, or color either. In order to make it detectible, an odorant (mercaptan) is added. The odorant smells similar to rotten eggs. Some people have also described it as smelling like rotten cabbage or dirty socks. Knowing what the odorant smells like will alert you to a leak in your home or business, but some outdoor leaks might not be detectible by smell. If you see "air" bubbles coming up through water in your yard, or see unexplainable dead spots in your yard, these can also be indicators of a potential natural gas leak. If you suspect a natural gas leak, get at least 300 feet away from the area and call 911 immediately.

The last major natural gas safety topic Utilities educate about is gas meter safety. Gas meters are generally mounted on the outside of a building which exposes them to the elements including snow and ice. To work properly, gas meters have a regulator that senses the air pressure in order to adjust and provide the correct pressure to the building. Snow and ice buildup can cause regulators to function improperly. Ensuring that snow is gently brushed from meters, and ice is carefully removed, will allow the regulator to continue operating properly. If you notice your gas meter has snow or ice on it, gently shovel the area clear then use a brush or a gloved hand to remove snow and ice. Ice that can't be removed by hand should be reported to your gas utility for proper removal.

Visit OPU's website for more information on natural gas safety.



# 2-1-1 HOPE STARTS HERE.

United Way 2-1-1 is a trusted source for information. Save time and stress by cutting through the noise to get reliable information that can help you address a problem or find an opportunity.

Contact 2-1-1 to learn about the following services:



• Food and housing support



• Mental health and substance abuse resources



• Legal assistance



• Youth programs



• Medical and dental clinics

• Job training opportunities



• Household items  
...and much more!



Minnesota  
**2-1-1**  
TM  
Powered by Greater Twin Cities United Way



Dial 2-1-1, text 898-211  
or visit [211UNITEDWAY.ORG](http://211UNITEDWAY.ORG)

24/7 • FREE • CONFIDENTIAL • MULTILINGUAL

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.)

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

**Call SEMCAC!**  
**800-944-3281**

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

**THE SALVATION ARMY**  
**HeatShare**

## What is HeatShare?

HeatShare is a voluntary non-governmental program of The Salvation Army that has been in existence since 1982. When you give to HeatShare, you are helping to warm the lives of the elderly, people with disabilities, and others who have nowhere else to turn. HeatShare provides financial assistance on a year-round basis and is used for electricity, natural gas, oil, propane, or wood.

## Who does HeatShare help?

- Seniors with low income and no alternate source of help.
- People with disabilities who are limited in their ability to maintain income to adequately cover energy costs.
- People who have an unexpected crisis and as a result cannot pay for household energy bills.

## What can you do to support your neighbor?

You can give the gift of heat by sending a tax-deductible donation to:

The Salvation Army, HeatShare Program, 2445 Prior Ave., Roseville, MN 55113

\*Please make checks payable to Heatshare  
[www.heatshare.org](http://www.heatshare.org); 1-800-842-7279



# CARBON MONOXIDE

SYMPTOMS? = GET OUT! • CALL OPU • 24 HRS • 507.451.1616

- Poisonous, potentially deadly gas
- Dangerous because it is colorless, tasteless, and odorless
- Learn the symptoms of exposure listed below:
  - HEADACHE
  - DIZZY
  - DROWSY
  - WEAK
  - NAUSEA
  - VOMITING
  - CONVULSIONS



Learn more about  
Carbon Monoxide at

[www.OwatonnaUtilities.com](http://www.OwatonnaUtilities.com)



## Clean Streets for Clean Water!

In urbanized areas, stormwater carries phosphorus and other pollutants directly into Minnesota's water resources through the drainage system. Unlike Owatonna's household wastewater, stormwater does not go through the Wastewater Treatment Facility. In many cases, stormwater is discharged directly to our rivers and creeks.

## Fall Clean Water Tips

1. Have a storm drain near your home? Volunteer to adopt it through the City's Adopt a Catch Basin Program and receive a complimentary rake to keep it free of leaves and debris.
2. Sweep up your grass clippings, leaves, and other debris from driveways, sidewalks, and the street. Don't forget to keep the gutters cleared.
3. Clean up any excess fertilizer that has spread onto hard surfaces during application.
4. Even as the weather turns cold, continue scooping your pet's waste.
5. During routine fall tune-ups check your vehicle and outdoor equipment for leaks.

Learn more about the Adopt-A-Catch Basin Program by contacting Bradley D. Rademacher, Water Quality/ Stormwater Specialist at (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 Hardware & Paint  
Batteries + Bulbs  
Lowe's      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>

[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

### 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.

# Minnesota Cold Weather Rule

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

1. Your total household income is less than 50% 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 reasonable, 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.

## 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.

