

# THE RESOURCE

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Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association



Hometown services.  
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## Minnesota goes to Washington

By Bill Black, MMUA Government Relations Attorney

**In late February, Minnesota again brought one of the largest state delegations to the annual American Public Power Association (APPA) Legislative Rally.**

This year, 59 MMUA members, including utility managers, commissioners, council members, and mayors, plus several of their spouses, daughters, and sons, joined MMUA staff in Washington, DC, February 24–26 during the annual event.

APPA staged the rally, as it has for a dozen or so consecutive years, from the historic Mayflower Hotel, holding conference events in ballrooms that hosted many past presidential inaugural balls. The atmosphere was much more in tune with business and networking than

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Members of the Minnesota delegation to the 2025 APPA Legislative Rally pause for a photo in front of the US capitol. Pictured (l-r) are SMMPA External Affairs Officer Joe Hoffman, Owatonna Mayor Matt Jessop, Grand Rapids Public Utilities Manager Julie Kennedy and her daughter Allie, and Owatonna Public Utilities General Manager Roger Warehime. Kennedy and Warehime are also members of the MMUA Board of Directors.

## Slayton asks PUC for contested hearing in formation of new municipal electric utility



**The City of Slayton, a south-western Minnesota community of about 2,000 residents in Murray County, has petitioned the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) for a Section 216B.45 proceeding before the Commission on the matter of “just compensation” for Xcel Energy’s infrastructure.**

Slayton is seeking to acquire Xcel facilities in order to form a municipal electric utility.

In a special election last year, Slayton residents voted “yes” to a resolution to municipalize.

There was 37 percent voter turnout, with 300 votes (73 percent) in favor of buying out Xcel. According to Slayton officials, the impetus for forming a municipal electric utility was ratepayer frustration with service-related issues. These include rising rates, outages, failing infrastructure, long repair times, and a lack of community control.

Josh Malchow, Slayton City Clerk/Administrator, told MMUA that the path to municipalization began in late 2021. Since Slayton’s franchise agreement with Xcel

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## BESS system proposed for Glenville meets local resistance

**Nearly 100 locals of Glenville attended an information meeting on March 3 regarding a battery energy storage system (BESS) that developers want to locate in their community.**

Glenville is a Minnesota town of about 562 residents located on the Shellrock River in south central Freeborn County, just six miles from the Iowa line.

According to the project application (Docket Number: IP-7138/ESS-24-294, IP-7138/TL-24-295), the Midwater Energy Storage Project, consisting of a BESS Facility and a 161 kV high voltage transmission line (HVTL), is planned for construction in the first quarter of 2027 with commercial operations to begin by the end of 2027. The project is being proposed by Midwater BESS LLC and developed by Spearmint Energy based in Miami, Florida.

To proceed, developers are seeking a site permit from the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) for the BESS facility and a route permit for the HVTL facility. The applica-



tion follows the Minnesota Power Plant Siting Act and relevant administrative rules, with specific exemptions for energy storage systems similar to those proposed in the project. These permits are the only land use approvals required for construction.

Local residents are concerned the proposed infrastructure, slated for placement on 10–20 acres of private land near the ITC Midwest substation, will endanger the town of Glenville and threaten the environment. The proposed location is approximately 350 feet from the Shellrock River and less than a

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# MMUA open house and Twins game: you are invited!

## Are you and your family looking for a great way to spend a summer Friday?

Join MMUA for a tour of our new offices and then hop on our chartered bus for a Twins game! On Friday, June 6, MMUA will be hosting an open house at its new St. Louis Park office from 2:00 to 5:00 pm. The building is just off US 169 and 394—so if you hate driving in the Twin Cities, this will be easy. When you get here, we will show you around and provide light refreshments. That way you won't get too hungry while chatting with the MMUA Board and other members while you check out the office space. You also won't get too full, so you'll have room for a hot dog at the ballpark. For those who are interested, a little after 5:00 pm we'll ride comfortably on a chartered bus

and head toward Target Field. Let other people worry about the rush hour traffic. You'll be enjoying the company of other municipal utilities pros and anticipating a great evening. However, if you prefer to keep your options open, you can skip the bus and just meet us at the ballpark. Parking in the ramps nearby is usually between \$20 and \$30 per car. The Twins are playing the Blue Jays at 7:10 pm, and we'll get there early enough to look around the stadium, grab food and beverages, and contemplate the purchase of unnecessary tchotchkes that seem really important at a ballgame. You'll still have time to get settled into your seat before the national anthem. If you choose to ride the bus, there is plenty of free parking in our office parking ramp, so you can leave your vehicle there without

worry. There are also plenty of affordable hotels located within a short distance of our office. Rumor has it there may be some extra entertainment after the game, but the Twins won't announce that until sometime into the season. The open house is free for you and your family. You are welcome to visit our office whether or not you decide to join us for the baseball game. Tickets for our excellent seats in section 120 and 121 along the third base line are \$60 and it's \$25 per person to ride the bus, which are MMUA's costs. Please register for the open house, ballgame, and bus on MMUA's website at [mmua.org/events](http://mmua.org/events). If you have questions, please email Shelly Dau at [sdau@mmua.org](mailto:sdau@mmua.org) or Rita Kelly at [rkelly@mmua.org](mailto:rkelly@mmua.org).



## ATTENTION MMUA MEMBERS

### SAVE THE DATE JUNE 6

Come to the MMUA office to visit our new space and get to know us better. That evening, come join us to watch a Twins game.

Check out [mmua.org/events](http://mmua.org/events) for more information or to purchase Twins tickets.



# FERC approves MISO's proposal limiting size of interconnection queue studies

## On January 30, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) announced that it would accept the Midcontinent Independent System Operator's (MISO) plans to limit the size of its interconnection queue studies.

MISO and other system operators have experienced a surge in interconnection requests in recent years. MISO's interconnection queue totals 309 gigawatts (GW), according to FERC. In comparison, MISO's peak load was 127.1 GW, and there was 191 GW of capacity in its region as of December 2023,

the agency said. MISO described the queue cap as helping the organization provide customers with better information, reducing delays, and providing more accurate modeling. Under MISO's approved plan, for each queue study cycle, the grid operator will set a megawatt cap at 50 percent of the non-coincident peak value for each study region from the power flow model used in its most recent transmission expansion plan model series, according to FERC. Exemptions to this rule will be offered to interconnection requests that occur when a large power plant

is replacing a retiring generation plant. Many clean energy organizations were concerned with the rules preventing access to the grid from new players in the energy space. About a year ago, FERC rejected MISO's initial queue cap proposal, saying the agency was concerned about proposed exemptions to the cap, the description of the cap's formula and potential resource adequacy issues that could be caused by the proposal. FERC will continue to review this queue cap for three queue study cycles.



# Wearing hats and spinning plates

*“In the beginning, Bartholomew Cubbins didn’t have five hundred hats. He only had one hat.”*

– Dr. Seuss, *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*

## Back in kindergarten, our teacher read a book to us one day.

In the story, a boy named Bartholomew Cubbins finds himself in an absurd predicament. He is traveling to town when he encounters the King’s procession. As custom dictates, he removes his hat, but to his surprise, another hat instantly appears on his head. No matter how many times he removes it, another hat appears in its place. No matter what he does, he cannot escape the hats he must wear.

Does this sound like an average day in the life of a municipal utility leader? Unlike large investor-owned utilities (IOUs), where entire departments handle operations, finance, regulatory compliance, customer service, and public relations, most hometown utilities in Minnesota rely on a small but hardy band of individuals to do it all. Leaders—whether a general manager, field supervisor, or commission member—are expected to be the strategist, problem-solver, and public relations expert. On bad days, the leaders are also the emergency responders.

While the autonomy and close-knit nature of a small team operating in a hometown utility can be highly rewarding, a lot of things can fall to just one person. It’s not often possible or practical to build in redundancy for key duties, and that presents unique challenges they don’t likely experience over at Xcel Energy. Municipal utility leaders are stretched thin, and there isn’t a lot of room for error.

So this month, I thought it might make sense to take a look at some of the common difficulties of leading a small organization,

offer some observations, and provide practical suggestions for staying sane.

### The challenges of leading

#### 1. You are the backup plan

In a well-staffed IOU, if a leader takes a sick day, there’s another person to step in. In a small municipal utility, often the only backup plan is you. When a drunk driver hits a transformer box at 2:00 am, there’s a gas leak, or the billing software malfunctions, you’re the one who gets the call.

**Suggestion:** Embrace delegation, documentation, and—when possible—automation. Think about what would happen if you suddenly had emergency surgery or were lost at sea. Your utility shouldn’t grind to a halt. At times like those, the importance of having a backup plan is critical. Someone who can’t fill your shoes all the time might be able to do some things on a fill-in basis, especially if you create clear policies and operational manuals. Whenever it’s achievable, lighten the load of what needs to be tended by automating systems such as asset management and outage tracking software, payroll software, and automated metering systems (AMR/AMI).

#### 2. Decision fatigue is real

From the trivial (where and when should we hold the annual staff holiday party?) to the mission-critical (what infrastructure upgrades make sense considering ratepayers’ needs for affordability, the carbon-free mandate, and the condition of our system?), making choices is a constant requirement. Without a robust support system, this constant demand can lead to decision fatigue—a condition where your brain is simply too tired

to care whether you approve a \$200 tool purchase or hold off until next month.

**Suggestion:** Develop a decision-making framework. Create—or update—and communicate clear criteria for what needs commission approval, what requires public notice, and what can be handled internally. At MMUA we have a “delegation of authority” matrix for certain decisions that gives everyone clarity about who can do what if I am not around. Encourage staff to take ownership of smaller operational decisions so you can focus on strategic and financial priorities. Be clear about when they should consult you versus when they should just run with something. The goal is that things get done, nobody feels abandoned, and you don’t end up with a bad surprise because someone got out too far over their skis.

#### 3. Delegation is a fantasy

Delegation is often touted as the secret to effective leadership. Unfortunately, in small municipal utilities, there simply may not be anyone to delegate to. If your utility serves a thousand customers and your staff is already stretched thin, handing off tasks isn’t always an option.

**Suggestion:** Look outside your immediate team. Consider regional partnerships, sharing staff with neighboring municipal utilities, outsourcing specialized tasks like rate studies, and leveraging consultants for grant writing or engineering support. MMUA and its associate members can help with many of these things.

#### 4. Burnout is always lurking

When every role is essential, taking a break feels impossible. Hometown utility leaders

## From My Desk to Yours

Karleen Kos  
MMUA CEO



frequently push through exhaustion because they know that if they don’t, outages won’t be restored as fast, water quality reports won’t be filed, and the next public meeting might be a disaster. This can quickly lead to burn-out, reducing effectiveness and job satisfaction.

**Suggestion:** Prioritize self-care as if your job depends on it—because it does. Set firm boundaries around your working hours, take breaks, and create an emergency plan for when you need time off. I know this is harder than it sounds, but I have found simple things make a big difference. For example, when I have a big project, I sometimes block time on my calendar to work on it as if it were an appointment. The MMUA staff team knows I’m in my office and available if there’s a true need, but just blocking the time and closing my door for a couple of hours helps with productivity so I can get home before the rooster crows at sunup. Something else you can do is leverage state and national associations like MMUA, APPA, and the League of Minnesota Cities for peer support and resources. Invariably, someone else has had your struggle and knows another way to do things. Taking time to network helps you get different ideas and answers while also reducing the sense of being all alone.

commission or city council to ensure alignment on long-term planning. Again, leverage MMUA and other association resources to help with these things. For example, right now we are offering free community training on chemical safety that is a great way to engage the public and let us tell your story. We offer free regional meetings in June to educate commissioners and the community about the impact of the legislative session on hometown utilities. Around the state, I have seen so many creative ways of connecting with ratepayers. If you are fresh out of ideas, be assured some other hometown utility leader has an idea they have tried that might help. Don’t be reluctant to ask.

### Strategies for survival and success

#### 1. Build a reliable support network

Even if you don’t have an internal leadership team, you don’t have to go it alone. Use MMUA’s member directory (both hard copy and online) to reach out to your peers around the state. Industry conferences provide invaluable guidance and moral support. Think you can’t get away? Refer back to #1 above and make it a priority to create a short-term backup plan. You need it for a lot of reasons, and support for yourself is a valid one.

#### 2. Maintain perspective on imperfection

We all want to do things well. In utilities, we are lucky if mistakes merely lead to frustration and drama, rather than injury or death. I am not suggesting we ignore these real risks. But not everything is that serious. Bills will be miscalculated, a public comment period will be overlooked, and a driver will back over someone’s flower bed. Sometimes infrastructure failures will occur. Accepting that perfection is unattainable can make the job far more manageable and enjoyable. It also makes it more likely that people will take the truly crucial things—like safety—seriously because they stand out more than if every bent begonia is treated like a crisis.

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Slayton asks PUC for contested hearing

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was set to expire anyway, the time was right to consider other options. With help from legal counsel and consultant Dave Berg, the community eventually reached the point of holding its successful referendum in May 2024. The vote authorized Slayton to spend up to \$7 million on start-up costs.

Negotiations to purchase Xcel’s infrastructure began shortly thereafter. However, the entities have now “reached an impasse,” according to Slayton’s petition for a contested case proceeding (25-129 SA). Slayton believes such a proceeding is essential for the City to develop a full record, including the actual cost of serving customers in Slayton and other relevant price factors contained in Minnesota statute section 216B.45. This law outlines the requirements for the municipal purchase of a public utility, and describes the means by which such impasses may be resolved. Specifically, “Whenever the commission is

notified by the municipality or the public utility affected that the municipality has, pursuant to law, determined to purchase the property of the public utility, and that the parties to the purchase and sale have been unable to agree on the amount to be paid and received therefor, [sic] the commission shall set a time and place for a public hearing, after not less than 30 days’ notice to the parties, upon the matter of just compensation or the matter of the property to be purchased.”

In its February 24 filing, Slayton is requesting a contested case hearing. The City asserts, “This case presents the first Section 216B.45 compensation proceeding before the Commission since the adoption by the Legislature of the 1974 Public Utilities Act. It is also the first to directly involve the acquisition of an investor-owned electric utility’s service territory, including those carried out pursuant to Section 216B.44 (existing mu-

nicipal utilities). Thus, this case involves unique and contested facts to be applied to the just compensation factors set forth in Section 216B.45.” The primary remaining issue is the loss of revenue component.

In a conversation with consultant Dave Berg on March 6, Berg told MMUA that the formula for loss of revenue needs to be revisited. He explained that the present rule of thumb—compensation for 10 years of lost revenue—dates back to a 1984 case in which the details were substantially different than those in the Slayton v. Xcel case today. He does not believe the principles of that case should be applied to the Slayton matter. Since then, the PUC has stated in at least one other case (see the PUC’s 2005 order determining compensation in a Grand Rapids Public Utilities Commission territory case E-243, 106/SA-03-896), “[E]very compensation decision is unique, based on detailed facts specific to the



displaced utility and the service area at issue. Utility costs vary significantly with geography, topography, population density, system capacity, fuel source proximity, terms of purchased power contracts, timing (and therefore capital costs) of major investments, and other factors. The costs of serving specific areas also vary with these factors and with the specific characteristics of the area and

its load. In short, the formula for determining net revenue loss can and does produce significantly different results in different situations, making the final outcomes in previous cases of little significance in resolving subsequent cases.”

MMUA’s government relations team is reviewing the matter and expects to be filing comments by the deadline of April 7.

Wearing hats and spinning plates

Continued from page 3

- 3. **Communicate clearly with your team and the public**  
Hometown utilities thrive on strong communication and relationships with employees and the public. Make expectations explicit, hold regular meetings, and create a culture where feedback flows in both directions. This helps prevent misunderstandings and ensures that everyone is on the same page, including your commission and the wider community of ratepayers.
- 4. **Celebrate small wins**  
When resources are limited and challenges are constant, it’s easy to focus on what’s going wrong. Taking time to recognize and celebrate small victories—like securing a grant or completing an infrastructure project under budget—can boost morale and maintain public trust through your transparency.
- 5. **Be selective about how you evolve**  
Many small utilities are all about maintaining their systems in the face of very little growth in population or industry. Others are seeing rapid changes in size due to location or some other factor like data centers that want to move into town. While expanding service areas or adding capacity is appealing, growth for its own sake can stretch resources and create community backlash. This is where a good strategic plan—

or at least, a clear strategic direction that has the support of the commission—is invaluable. Done well, this will help you ensure that you have the infrastructure, workforce, and community readiness you need for success.

**Spinning plates**

Leading a hometown utility is a unique and often absurd adventure. It would be challenging enough if we were merely like Bartholomew Cubbins wearing his many hats on the way to town. We are also like the old plate spinners on the Ed Sullivan Show—so we find ourselves wearing 500 hats and walking to town while also spinning a dozen plates representing family needs, home ownership, hobbies, health issues, and community commitments—and hoping they don’t fall.

How did the plate spinners do it? On Sunday nights for decades, as Ed watched from the sidelines, they kept the dishware in motion, attended to the ones that were wobbling, and monitored the entire process—even as they kept adding plates or took up juggling balls at the same time. None of us wants to be that busy of course, but it happens.

In hometown utilities, work-life balance can be an illusion. We do our best to keep everything turning in the right direction with the right hats on our head.

Even when we achieve that for a while, something will always happen to disrupt it. Like dealing with the wobbly plates, we sometimes have to focus more intently on one area to get it on track and still keep the rest going. That can be stressful at work and at home.

Succeeding in the leadership of a hometown utility demands resilience, adaptability, understanding from our families, and an ability to laugh in the face of truly odd situations. While the challenges are many, the rewards—providing essential services, maintaining public trust, and ensuring a sustainable future for our communities—make it all worthwhile.

As you trudge the road to town wearing all those hats and spinning all those plates, remember you’re not alone. Everyone drops a plate now and then. Every utility leader has faced an unexpected outage, navigated a politically charged community discussion, had to choose between Easter dinner with the family and helping with a water main break, and wondered if they were losing their mind. The key is to find systems that work, to lean on your MMUA network, and occasionally take a step back to appreciate just how beautifully you manage to do the impossible.

Pennsylvania’s governor aims to speed up large-scale energy projects



**On January 30, Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro put forward a multi-part plan to implement millions of dollars of energy tax credits and to create a new board for fast-tracking energy projects in the state.**

These efforts would help speed up the development of large-scale energy projects in the state.

Shapiro’s plans include tax credits for power plants, hydrogen producers, and makers of green fuels. A new power plant could reap \$100 million in tax credits per year for three years, with a hydrogen manufacturer receiving \$49 million a year and

a green jet fuel producer receiving \$15 million a year.

Through the proposed Pennsylvania Reliable Energy Siting and Electric Transition Board, the state would aim to speed up permitting of new power plants and other energy infrastructure.

Shapiro also hopes to encourage the modernization of the state’s energy efficiency programs. Rebates for new, efficient appliances and retrofitting of homes would be modified under the governor’s proposal.

The Pennsylvania General Assembly will need to approve the governor’s plan before it can go into effect.



**BESS system proposed for Glenville**

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mile from the nearby Glenville-Emmons High School.

The project application indicates the 150-megawatt battery energy storage system could store enough electricity to power as many as 100,000 homes for up to four hours. According to Yahoo! News, project spokesperson Mary Matze has described the installation as a series of fully contained units. When complete, the project may include as many as 75 to 100 separate containers holding lithium-ion batteries, inverters, and cooling and safety systems spread over the allocated ground space, with batteries stacked in drawers in each unit. At this time, the developers do not have a customer for the power they intend to produce. According to Matze, the company is “still looking for a power purchase agreement, which could be with any utility ....”

Attendees at the community meeting in Glenville gathered in the school gymnasium to learn about the project and its implications. Coverage by local media stated all the residents to whom reporters spoke were against the BESS system being installed in its proposed location. Concerns include fire risks, battery leaks onto neighboring land and the

Shellrock River, and worry the power produced by the project will be supporting “greater metropolises.” Residents say the power is not needed by the local area, and the project won’t produce enough tax revenue to justify the risk to the community.

KAAL television quoted local resident Greg Olson, who was said to be voicing the opinions of many. “There’s a lot of concerned citizens ... the possibility of toxins coming down the river with a fire, or from the fire if they are trying to put it out, the local fire department here said they won’t put it out with water because they will probably just let it burn, but that’s the danger.” Many Glenville residents were reportedly aware of the January 16 BESS fire at the Moss Landing Energy Storage Facility in Monterey County, California, which prompted the evacuation of 1,200 to 1,500 residents. That incident resulted in a moratorium being placed on the approval of any new BESS facilities in Orange County and a recommendation for higher BESS standards in the state of California.

The Minnesota Department of Commerce (DOC) issued a notice of public information and environmental assessment scoping meetings for the Midwater



Energy Storage Project on February 7 and held a public meeting on February 19 in Albert Lea, the Freeborn County seat, located about six miles from Glenville. An online meeting was also scheduled for February 20. It is unclear who attended those meetings, and media coverage cannot be found.

However, later on February 20, Glenville City Council member Cary Williamson sent an email to DOC at 9:00 pm stating, “I believe there should be a public meeting held in Glenville with representatives of this project. Very few residents were aware of the meeting in Albert Lea. To me it looks like someone is trying to do the bare minimum

as far as meeting with the community and land owners next too [sic] and down river of the proposed site.”

A petition to the PUC dated February 25 has been signed by dozens of local residents. It cites “thermal runaway risks, the surrounding wildlife environment, river and aquifer pollution, and the potential need for evacuation of Glenville” as rationale to deny developers the permit to build on the proposed location.

The March 3 meeting in Glenville was organized by citizens who said few of the residents that would be affected by the new system were notified as they should have been. According to locals, additional meetings are being planned. Organizer Daniel Minear, who describes himself in a letter to Governor Walz and Lieutenant Governor Flanagan as “a near lifelong Minnesotan of 45 years and a renewable energy professional with 26 years of experience building biofuels, wind, solar and BESS facilities across this great country,” has called for an “[i]mmediate moratorium on permitting for battery energy storage systems (BESS) within 2 miles of Minnesota’s inland bodies of water and their tributaries, state border waters and their tributaries, and all

tributaries of the Mississippi River.” He invited the governor and lieutenant governor to meet with residents in Glenville on March 15. He also offered to “assemble a delegation to meet you at the capital for further discussion.”

The original comment period for the project ended March 10, and it has now been extended to April 21. Another scoping meeting with state agencies and Spearmint Energy is being planned in Glenville for April 7, 2025.

If granted, the Midwest Energy Storage Project permit would be valid for 30 years, though the system’s batteries only have a guaranteed lifespan of 20–25 years. Developers say if the project gets the necessary approvals, they hope to begin construction in 2027. Yahoo! News reports the project spokesperson, Mary Matze, concedes they “strongly expect those dates will get pushed back.” Meanwhile in Glenville, the petition drive continues. In a Facebook post on March 15, an organizer exhorted local residents to “Keep the signatures coming!”

# TRANSFORMERS

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Minnesota goes to Washington

Continued from page 1



partying, though. Hundreds of participants from across the US met or reconnected during coffee breaks in bright corridors or amid rows and rows of convention-style seating in large high-ceilinged spaces. Actions promised and already taken by the new four-year administration, after one month in office, were eliciting a mix of optimism and nervousness among attendees, rather unlike any vibe at the rally in recent years. Just three blocks from the White House, the Mayflower felt as though it was within sight of where the nation’s eyes are looking.

Amidst the backdrop of heightened awareness, attendees focused on the rally’s conference activities. The first day’s program aimed to prepare participants for visits to Capitol Hill. In a change from the agendas of prior rallies, this year APPA filled Monday morning with two 90-minute “policy deep dives” included with the price of registration, replacing the usual “pre-conference” subject area seminars for which they previously charged additional fees. The first “dive” explained how big picture policies related to supply chains and international trade are affecting utilities’ ability to purchase needed materials and equipment. In the second presentation, three tax policy experts talked in detail about the rally’s top political issue—the threat posed by federal budget-making focused on reducing deficits to the income tax exemption for municipal bond holders, an essential tool that keeps public utility financing affordable for local communities.

Meanwhile on Monday morning, MMUA’s CEO Karleen Kos was meeting with her peers regarding association operations around the country, and then she sat in as a member of the nationwide Buyout Sellout Working Group. In this group, APPA staff and statewide association leaders work to develop tools and tactics that make it easier to form municipal utilities and to ensure that sales are in the best interests of the communities they serve.

The afternoon included meetings for joint action agencies to discuss areas of particular interest to them as well as a reg-

ular meeting of the APPA Policy Makers Council. Late in the day, APPA’s government affairs staff gave a legislative and regulatory briefing for all attendees. Those seated in the nearly full ballroom learned talking points and explanations to use in their grassroots lobbying on Capitol Hill. In addition to talking about protecting tax-exempt financing and overcoming supply chain problems, the speakers encouraged participants to engage their senators and representatives on reforming energy infrastructure permitting and maintaining tax credit availability for public power energy projects. After that, the conferees moved across the corridor for the annual welcome reception, where everyone could meet and mingle with colleagues from around the country.

Rally business on Tuesday morning consisted mainly of discussing the work of the Legislative and Resolutions Committee, then voting to approve the resolutions presented for 2025. This year, MMUA cosponsored two of resolutions. One supports the “beneficiary pays” principle that says federal hydropower customers (1) should not be charged for costs for which they receive no benefit and (2) that the federal power marketing authorities (PMAs) should maintain the authority to set federal hydropower rates. The second resolution MMUA cosponsored affirms the public power community’s position that the federal government should not seek to privatize or sell the PMAs or force them to change from cost-based rates to market-based rates. The committee wrapped up with time to spare before the scheduled luncheon. After dessert, attendees heard from speaker Jonathan Martin, Politics Bureau Chief and Senior Political Columnist with POLITICO, on the environment in Washington, as well as current issues shaping politics and policy in the capital.

Every year, the rally schedule for Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday is left open so participants can lobby their US representatives and senators on the federal policy issues currently facing the industry. As noted above, public power advocates had a lot to talk about. Minne-

sota’s delegation was thoroughly prepared after being briefed and provided with background materials on the issues from MMUA, APPA, and, for some, their joint action agency. MMUA members and MMUA staff, along with our Washington lobbyist Michael Nolan, attended numerous office appointments with their representatives, senators, and legislative teams in a great show of support for public power.

Taking our message directly to the delegates elected by the people of Minnesota to represent us in our federal government is an especially and historically American tradition and privilege. And nothing brings the corresponding feeling of significance home to a citizen like looking up from just a block or two away at the US Capitol building in its monumental white marble on a clear, bright, blue-sky winter morning.

Across Constitution Avenue stand the three other large, marble buildings—Russell, Dirksen, and Hart—that house the individual and committee offices of the senate. On the ground level of the Dirksen Senate Office Building, in room 11, on Wednesday, February 25 at 8:20 a.m., and again at 9:45 a.m., a determined group of Minnesotans nearly filled six 12-seat rows on behalf of all the readers of this newspaper. In back-to-back advocacy meetings led by MMUA’s Director of Government Relations and Senior Counsel Kent Sulem, these utility representatives were seen and listened to, in person, by our US senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith. The Senators saw their dedicated fellow Minnesotans in an organized group, looking them in the eye with concern. They heard those concerns distilled into focused messages describing how they could use their votes and voices on Capitol Hill in ways that will help make life better for their constituents—the customer-owners, staff, and governing local officials of Minnesota’s municipal utilities.

Our senators heard that the municipal bond interest tax exemption appears to be in danger as the new administration seeks more ways to increase federal revenue to offset major spending cuts. They heard that current law exempts the interest paid on municipal bonds from federal income taxes and has provided this exemption since the US tax code was developed in 1913. This makes municipal bonds, which finance 95 percent of the nation’s infrastructure, attractive to stable investment seekers like retirement funds, which many people rely on. Meanwhile, the exemption collectively saves local governments billions of

dollars each year. Subjecting municipal bonds to taxes would amount to imposing a tax on local governments and municipal utilities, and it would increase the costs of projects. These increases would need to be passed on to utility customers through increased cost-based rates.

The senators also heard their constituents in the room ask them to resist any efforts to repeal “direct pay,” or “elective pay” tax credits that help level the playing field for municipal utilities looking to invest in certain types of energy projects. In 2022, Congress passed a way for non-taxed entities, including municipal utilities, to benefit from federal incentives that already benefited investor-owned utilities. Lobbied for in the 2010s by APPA and MMUA, and championed by Senator Smith, this evolved version of “comparable incentives,” as we called them, allow consumer-owned utilities the same help as investor-owned utilities (IOUs) receive for wind, solar, hydrogen, and nuclear energy, as well as carbon capture and electric vehicles. With MMUA members just beginning to reap their benefits and some requirements needing refinement, the group urged the senators not to let elective pay fall to the federal budgeting ax.

The assembled Minnesotans also addressed federal permitting for energy infrastructure. With a major electric industry transformation underway, utilities leading it must be able to put massive amounts of steel in the ground, on the ground, and in the sky. Our congressional delegation can aid in that effort by supporting only such regu-

lation as is necessary to accomplish prudent federal policies, like protection of the nation’s natural environment.

In the 20 or so minutes MMUA members had with each senator, they managed to pack in brief messages on a few more issues and provided further details for the senators and their staff via written handouts. They asked for consideration under the current federal mandate requiring all lead water service lines to be replaced by 2037. They offered strong support for legislation to allow the use of tax-free college savings accounts for expenses related to education and training for jobs that require a certificate or license but not a college degree. Finally, they asked for opposition to rising pressure toward taxing non-profit entities like MMUA, which would make it more expensive for them to provide services.

On the other side of the Capitol building stand the Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn House office buildings. In smaller groups, the MMUA members took the same messages to Minnesota’s US representatives’ individual offices for audiences with them or members of their staff. It is through these important, though brief, meetings with Minnesota’s Congressional delegation that MMUA members not only convey their extremely significant perspective on federal policies affecting real Minnesotans, but they demonstrate by coming to Washington to meet with our elected representatives in person and all the effort that entails, that public power has support back home and pays attention to their actions in our nation’s capital.

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# Minnesota goes to Washington



For most attendees, the event began with a welcome reception Monday evening, February 24. MMUA Director of Government Relations and Senior Counsel Kent Sulem (left) and Government Relations Attorney Bill Black (behind the camera) enjoyed greeting Minnesotans who made the trip to Washington to visit with our elected officials. Shown here on the right is Owatonna's new Mayor Matt Jessop, who was attending his first rally with MMUA.



Tim McCollough, General Manager of Rochester Public Utilities, and Jay Lutz, Commissioner at Austin Utilities, served as the voting delegates for their hometown entities at APPA's annual Legislative and Resolutions (L&R) Committee meeting.



At the 2025 L&R Committee meeting, APPA adopted nine policy statements covering topics ranging from support of hydropower and the Tennessee Valley Authority to support for safe and effective drone use. MMUA co-sponsored resolutions that passed unanimously in support of the Federal Power Marketing Administration and also in support of the beneficiary pays principle for the Power Marketing Administration.



MMUA sponsored tables at this year's L&R luncheon. Dalene Monsbrotten and Jasper Schneider from the Northern Municipal Power Agency in Thief River Falls joined one of the tables, enjoying good food and good conversation. In the background, Jonathan Martin, Politics Bureau Chief with Politico, kicked off his keynote address.



The Minnesota municipal utilities contingent fanned out to visit their representatives' offices on Tuesday and Wednesday. On Wednesday morning, everyone gathered in a room at the Hart Senate Office Building to meet with Minnesota's senators. During the pre-meeting briefing, Willmar General Manager Jaren Smith and Willmar Commission Member Carol Laumer paid rapt attention.



Senator Tina Smith demonstrated a deep understanding of the issues facing municipal utilities. She outlined priorities on which she will be working during the last two years of her current term as Minnesota's junior senator. She has announced that she will not run for re-election in 2026.



Senator Amy Klobuchar took time to kibbutz with MMUA members after discussing how she will work across the aisle to protect Minnesota's interests and advocate for fixes to bills that could be unfavorable to municipal utilities.



The Elk River Municipal Utilities (ERMU) delegation was able to get some face time with House Majority Whip Tom Emmer (MN-6) to advocate for public power utilities. Shown are (l-r) ERMU General Manager Mark Hanson, Commissioner Paul Bell, Representative Tom Emmer, Commissioner Nick Zerwas, and ERMU Governance and Communications Manager Tony Mauren.



# Building a resilient future: MMUA’s catalog of need

By Blaine Chaulkin, MMUA Grant Development and Technical Support Coordinator

Last year, the Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association (MMUA) was awarded a grant from the Minnesota Department of Commerce to support our members’ grant-seeking efforts.

In our proposal, we outlined a commitment to providing technical assistance and to collaborating with member utilities to create a catalog of actionable projects that would help us work together to find grant funding wherever it might be available. The goal is for MMUA to be better able to identify potential funding sources that will help you by cataloging your needs and “nice to haves.” This will help us match you with potential funding sources and also equip us to speak with lawmakers about Minnesota’s municipal utility needs. Ultimately, this initiative aims to enhance the resiliency and reliability of utility systems, contingent on securing adequate funding.

### What is the catalog of need?

The catalog of need is a comprehensive collection of projects designed to address the specific needs and priorities of Minnesota’s utility systems. These projects are focused on enhancing the resiliency and reliability of the state’s utility infrastructure. The catalog will serve as a reference

to better identify funding opportunities and communicate posted funding announcements with the members who need them.

### Collaboration and technical assistance

One of the key elements of this initiative is the collaboration among MMUA, utility members, and the communities they serve. By working together, we can leverage our collective expertise and resources to develop and implement effective solutions. MMUA provides technical assistance to help utility members navigate the complexities of project planning and execution. This support includes guidance on best grant-seeking, administration, and reporting practices, as well as access to specialized knowledge.

### Addressing specific needs and priorities

To ensure that the projects in the catalog of need address the specific needs and priorities of each community, MMUA is reaching out to a dozen members a week to set up conversations. Currently, we have spoken with 17 members and have recorded their responses. This personalized approach allows us to tailor our support to meet the unique requirements of each utility system, ensuring that the projects we undertake are both relevant and impactful. We extend our

heartfelt thanks to those members who have taken the time to speak with us.

### Government relations and advocacy

The responses gathered to build the catalog of need will play a crucial role in MMUA’s government relations efforts. By sharing the identified priorities and needs of municipal utilities with legislators, MMUA aims to advocate for grant funding that aligns with these priorities. This strategic approach ensures that the voices of our utility members are heard and that the necessary resources are allocated to support the most critical projects. Through effective advocacy, we can help promote legislation and policies that will provide the funding needed to enhance the resiliency and reliability of Minnesota’s utility systems.

In conclusion, the catalog of need is a vital initiative that underscores MMUA’s commitment to enhancing the resiliency and reliability of Minnesota’s utility systems. By collaborating, providing technical assistance, and securing adequate funding, we are working together to build a more resilient future for all. We look forward to discussing your specific needs and priorities during our scheduled calls and continuing to make meaningful progress on this important journey.

# Navigating direct pay means cash for your utility

**Direct pay—also known as elective pay—allows tax exempt and governmental entities to receive a payment equal to the full value of tax credits for qualifying clean energy projects.**

After years of lobbying by APPA and MMUA, this policy was finally codified in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in 2022.

Although direct pay is a federal policy, Minnesota state agencies have compiled a guide to elective/ direct pay processes and available technical assistance. It is available at [mn.gov/commerce-stat/pdfs/direct-pay-guide.pdf](https://mn.gov/commerce-stat/pdfs/direct-pay-guide.pdf). The document also links to other useful resources, such as a full list of the tax credits that are available and the types of projects that are eligible.

An important step in the process is pre-filing. All direct

pay applicants must submit a pre-filing registration to eventually claim direct pay incentives. Do this online at [www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/register-for-elective-payment-or-transfer-of-credits](https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/register-for-elective-payment-or-transfer-of-credits).

Municipal utilities can take advantage of assistance available from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regarding direct pay. The IRS has posted office hours twice a month through July for those who wish to get direct guidance or ask questions. You must register for these hours on the IRS website at [www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/register-for-elective-payment-or-transfer-of-credits](https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/register-for-elective-payment-or-transfer-of-credits)

The filing deadline for projects completed last year (2024) is May 15, 2025.

# Cedar Rapids wastewater treatment plant begins multi-year upgrade



**In February, work began on upgrades to the Cedar Rapids Water Control Facility in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.**

The \$318 million project, which is focused on plant rehabilitation, took nine years of planning — and will require about five years to complete. Cedar Rapids is the second largest city in Iowa; it opened its wastewater treatment plant in 1980.

Since then, the city has added around 26,000 residents, with many more moving to addresses in the neighboring communities of Hiawatha, Marion, Palo, and Robins, which the plant also serves. In total, the Cedar Rapids plant treats wastewater for 190,000 people. Although that represents a substantial number of Iowans, the plant’s capacity is considerably higher. In total, it can treat 125 million gallons of water and wastewater—capacity that is required to accommodate the area’s industrial needs.

According to local officials, the city is currently attracting wet industry customers that prefer offsite treatment, and it aims to continue to be an attractive option for future customers, such as data centers and warehouses.

The latest updates will replace obsolete systems, add capacity, and position the facility for growth if needs expand. The plant is also incorporating new anaerobic digesters, which will aid in processing water coming through the plant with minimal environmental impact. The digesters will also help turn bacteria into natural biogas, moving the plant toward being a net-zero facility.

The plant’s upgrades are being funded by a combination of grants, tax credits, cash, and loans from Iowa’s State Revolving Fund. Officials had also hoped to tap approximately \$37 million in funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, but now concede these funds may not be available.

# President seeks control of independent agencies

**On February 18, President Trump issued an executive order (EO) declaring that independent agencies exercise substantial executive authority without sufficient accountability to the President.**

By definition, however, independent agencies are created by Congress to operate outside of the control of the executive branch and are not under a Cabinet secretary nor the President. Nevertheless, President Trump believes these agencies have exceeded their authority and eroded their accountability to the American public. President Trump’s stated belief is that all officials wielding vast executive power must be supervised and controlled by the President.

The EO, entitled Ensuring Accountability for All Agencies, requires that independent agencies submit for review any proposed or final significant regulatory actions to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) before publication in the Federal

Register. OIRA is a part of the President’s Executive Office, and publication in the Federal Register is required to give final public notice of a proposed regulation. The review by OIRA will be done to ensure the regulation is consistent with the President’s intent and interpretation of the law.

The EO expressly states that the President’s interpretation of law shall be authoritative and controlling on all executive employees exercising the duties of their job. It also instructs the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to establish performance standards and management objectives for the head of each independent agency. In addition, each chairperson will be required to periodically consult with and coordinate policies and priorities with the directors of OMB, the White House Domestic Policy Council, and the White House National Economic Council.

Why is this an issue for municipal utilities? Because one of

the independent agencies subject to the EO is the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). What impact will this have at the utility level? That is not clear. The new chairperson of FERC, Mark Christi, has indicated that he thinks the EO largely formalizes existing practices. For example, FERC already submits its budget and major priorities for White House review. Further, it would be unusual for an agency led by a Presidential appointee to take a position contrary to the President’s. Others, however, are more skeptical and argue that if things are already good, why issue an EO that focuses so heavily on centralizing power under the President when the entities were established by Congress to be independent from executive fiat?

We will have to watch and listen for proposed issues of concern, but that is true whenever there is change. MMUA will keep you informed as implementation of the EO occurs.



# Widespread opposition grows to ConEd’s proposed rate increases

Customer complaints about rising rates are nothing new to Consolidated Edison—also known as ConEd—the investor-owned utility that serves more than nine million people in New York City and suburban Westchester County in New York.

This year, though, the usual grumbling is much louder as the company proposes to raise 2026 electricity and gas rates by double digits. In its filing, the company says it hopes to collect around \$1.6 billion more in electric revenue and \$440 million more in gas revenue with help from the rate hikes.

While the company claims the increases are necessary to “continue to build a clean, reliable, and resilient grid of the future while advancing New York State and New York City’s climate goals,” customers and elected officials have come out in force to oppose the hefty increases.

In a February 11 letter sent to the chair of New York State’s Public Service Commission, Governor Kathy Hochul directly objected to ConEd’s proposal to raise electricity rates by 11.4 percent and gas rates by 13.3 percent. She called for the rates

to be rejected and requested a statewide audit of the salaries of power executives.

In later comments posted on the New York governor’s official website Hochul said, “The cost of living is too damn high and New Yorkers need more money in their pockets. Of course we need safe, reliable energy sources to power our businesses. But utility companies shouldn’t be jacking up costs unnecessarily—especially if they are paying their own staff too much.”

On February 25, frustrated rate payers and lawmakers rallied outside ConEd’s headquarters in Manhattan to demand the New York State legislature pass the NY HEAT Act (S2016/A4592), which would limit the amount households pay for energy and further regulate rate hikes.

In a March 5 letter from State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins to Rory Christian, chair of the Public Service Commission, strong opposition to ConEdison’s rate requests was evident. She said, “I have seen bills from my constituents where ConEd’s delivery costs are twice as much as their supply costs ...I urge the Public Service Commission to listen to the public

and to deny ConEd’s request to increase its already excessive energy rates.”

On March 11, Westchester County Executive Ken Jenkins signed legislation that makes firm the county’s commitment to opposing the increases. This followed a unanimous bipartisan vote of the Westchester County Board of Legislators to join a major rate case in New York State.

Also on March 11, New York Assembly member Dana Levenberg, who represents the 95th District covering portions of Westchester and Putnam counties said, “Utility costs are among the top issues my office receives calls about.” She described ConEd’s rate request as “totally unacceptable” and says she is working within the state assembly to pass legislation that would both bring down utility costs and control future increases. At least two bills in addition to the NY HEAT Act have already been introduced in the assembly to limit how public utilities in the state obtain and use funds.

Ratepayers and officials have until November 21, 2025, to submit written comments on ConEd’s rate case.

# Eaton to build new South Carolina facility for the production of three-phase transformers



Power management company Eaton announced on February 12 that the company would invest \$340 million to build a plant for three-phase transformers in Jonesville, South Carolina.

The plant will be built in an existing building.

Eaton’s new plant will join two existing three-phase transformer

facilities in Waukesha, Wisconsin. Eaton also makes single-phase, pole-mount, and pad-mount transformers at a factory in Nacogdoches, Texas.

The new operation is expected to bring 700 jobs to Jonesville. Production of transformers is expected to begin in 2027.

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# MMUA conferences and schools provide value for members



Emergency preparedness

St. Cloud hosted MMUA's annual Emergency Preparedness and Restoration Conference February 19–20. Some 32 attendees gathered to review mutual aid events, strategies, and best practices. They also worked through a tabletop simulation and learned about the APPA cross segment mutual aid coordination process. Amy Zubaly, Executive Director of the Florida Municipal Electric Association, pictured here, provided an on-the-ground perspective about the planning, execution, and after-action paperwork necessary for a successful mutual aid event in her home state. Minnesota's municipal utilities are often deployed in Florida and have experienced frustrations with the billing process in the past.



Meter school

Fifty attendees at this year's MMUA Meter School, which was held February 4–7 at MMUA's Training Center in Marshall. Several learning stations kept attendees busy as they gathered to refresh their knowledge of basic metering and to study advanced metering infrastructure (AMI). Instructors covered components including smart meters that provide detailed usage information and the communication technologies that transmit this data securely. Key benefits of AMI include improved energy efficiency, enhanced customer engagement through detailed consumption insights, energy management, and better demand response capabilities for utilities.



Meter school

MMUA's schools and workshops are set up to be flexible and allow participants to progress at a pace that matches their motivation and abilities. The pre-conference workshops are ideal as an introduction course or as a refresher on basic metering training. Hands-on training is a major component of all MMUA schools. In this photo, meter school participants check out a metering setup and discuss various issues that can arise with their proper functioning.



Substation school

More than three dozen professionals from 20 utilities gathered in Otsego March 11–13 for MMUA's annual substation school. The event opened with Brian Krantz from Rochester Public Utilities covering the basics of substation maintenance and inspections. He was followed by Dave Krause and Paul Cervantez (pictured here) from Electric Power Systems, who taught attendees what they needed to know about substation configuration and took them through case studies that moved from theory to application. On the final day, topics included proper switching techniques and wrapped with Mike O'Neill from Schweitzer Engineering discussing Schweitzer relays.



Substation school

Substation school attendees went on a group tour of the Ramsey Renewable Station, led by Jared Newton of Connexus Energy. This innovative renewable energy site covers 27 acres and produces 3.4 megawatts of solar energy while storing up to 6 megawatts of power in its lithium-ion battery storage units near Ramsey, Minnesota. The bottoms of the panels on the array sit about one meter off the ground so that pollinator-friendly vegetation can grow beneath the panels. This also helps prevent drifting snow from interfering with generation.



Substation school

On a site visit to the Elk River Municipal Utilities substation and solar farm, Jon Wadsworth, ERMU's substation technician, answers questions about one of the substation transformers. ERMU delivers more than 333,600 megawatt hours of power annually through its 646 miles of line to 13,400 customers. They are a member of the Minnesota Municipal Power Agency.



# Nominations sought for MMUA awards, board of directors seats

## MMUA's Nominations and Awards Committee is accepting nominations for MMUA's 2025 industry awards.

This is a great way to recognize a municipal utility colleague, a public official, or a municipal utility system for showing leadership, innovation, and an example for others to follow.

### MMUA'S Awards Program

MMUA annually confers awards on members of the municipal utility community, and those who support us, for unique contributions to our industry. The awards include:

- **System Innovation Award**—Given to a utility that has demonstrated leadership and innovation in customer service, energy efficiency or renewables, technology, or other areas.
- **Public Service Award**—Given to a state or federal elected or appointed official who has been a strong supporter of MMUA and its members.
- **Distinguished Service Award**—Given to individuals who perform outstanding service in support of the association and its goals.

- **Community Service Award**—Given to an individual who has performed long and well in support of a municipal utility at the local level.
- **Rising Star Award**—Recognizes a future leader who has demonstrated a dedication to the goals and principles of municipal utilities through problem solving, creativity, and job knowledge.
- **Honorary Lifetime Membership**—This prestigious award symbolizes a long professional life dedicated not only to the advancement of municipal utilities locally, but also for the betterment of our industry on a statewide basis.

The deadline for 2025 submissions is June 20. The awards will be presented at the MMUA Summer Conference in Rochester on August 19.

Nomination forms for the various awards can be downloaded from the MMUA website beginning in early May. You may submit nominations in multiple categories; all nominations will be considered.

**Nominations for the Board of Directors**  
Serving on MMUA's Board of

Directors is an honor as well as a responsibility. It is also a great opportunity for professional growth. Two seats are open this year for regular members due to the regular rotation process and the addition of one board seat as allowed by the bylaws. In addition, one seat that may only be filled by a mayor, city council member, or municipal utilities commission member will be open. If you represent a regular MMUA member utility, are willing to accept responsibility for governance, and are available to actively participate as a Board member, please contact Karleen Kos to declare your interest and learn more about the nominations process.

Nomination forms should be submitted to Rita Kelly via email (rkelly@mmua.org) or regular mail (600 Highway 169 S, Ste 701, St. Louis Park, MN 55426). The deadline for nominations is June 20.

If you have any questions about the nominations process or what service on the board involves, please contact MMUA CEO Karleen Kos. She will be happy to discuss the role of the board members and the time commitment involved. Please email her at kkos@mmua.org or call her at 763.746.0701.

# University of Cambridge researchers develop solar-powered device that can capture carbon dioxide, turn it into sustainable fuel



**On February 13, researchers at the University of Cambridge in England stated in the journal *Nature Energy* that they had created a direct air carbon capture and utilization (DACCU) device that captures carbon dioxide (CO2), concentrates it, and turns it into renewable fuels.**

The unique machine is known as a solar-powered flow reactor. It uses filters to remove CO2 from the air during the night, while during daylight hours it heats the CO2. This kicks off a chemical reaction that turns the CO2 into solar syngas, which

can then be transformed into liquid fuels. At scale, the machine could offer many interesting implications for the world. It introduces the possibility of a carbon neutral future where fuels are derived from CO2 that was already in the air. Smaller units could allow people in off-the-grid environments to one day make environmentally friendly fuels anywhere on earth. The technology will be commercialized by the Cambridge Enterprise, a branch of the University of Cambridge.

# Canada's maritime municipals form alliance to help each other with clean energy efforts



**Municipal utilities from across the Canadian maritime provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island), have united to form the Maritime Municipal Electric Utility Alliance (MMEUA) to work on initiatives related to the clean energy transition.**

Some of the priorities of MMEUA will include grid efficiency, increasing public aware-

ness about the energy transition, and sharing resources among utilities. In a statement, the new chair of the Alliance, Glen Fillmore, said, "Our utilities share a vision of a cleaner, smarter, and more resilient energy future. MMEUA gives us the platform to lead climate action, foster innovation, and deliver sustainable solutions while respecting the unique strengths of each community we

serve." Utilities joining MMEUA include Saint John Energy, Edmundston Energy, the Perth-Andover Electric Light Commission in New Brunswick, municipal utilities in the Towns of Antigonish, Mahone Bay, Riverport, and Berwick in Nova Scotia, as well as the City of Summerside on Prince Edward Island.

# Cross training school is back in August 2025

**Do you have a small staff where everyone has to wear multiple hats?**

Does your team need to step up and help with things they may not know a lot about because they are the only person present? If so, consider formally cross training them so they can deal with those situations with confidence and safety. MMUA's Cross Training School is designed to help smaller utilities develop a pool of personnel who may be called on from time to time to assist the electric department. Smaller utilities may need to call on public works or other department personnel to assist—whether that is due to short staffing or needing help during an emergency. This course provides fundamental "basic training" to help participants increase their knowledge of lineworker tools/equipment, broaden their under-

standing of electricity and the hazards, and grow confidence in their ability to assist. This training can especially benefit first-year apprentice, public works, engineering, office, and other personnel. MMUA's assistant director of education and outreach, Cody Raveling, is the primary course instructor. Throughout the course, safety and best practices are incorporated, and every effort is made to ensure the instruction is applicable to the diverse group of participants, so that each participant obtains a solid foundation to build upon. One of last year's participants summed it up this way, "Excellent class. Very well presented. I learned a lot I can take back and use." Mark the dates of August 5–7 on your calendar and start thinking of who should attend from your utility. Registration will open in May.



# Susan Harwood Grant-funded training underway

**Did you know that hazard communication made OSHA's top 10 list of most common violations for the past 20 years or more?**

Recently, it was listed as the #2 most-cited standard during OSHA inspections, a dubious distinction to say the least. What about Minnesota specifically? The employee right to know (hazard communication) standard was the most cited standard across all industries in 2024.

Last summer, hometown utility members supported MMUA in obtaining a Susan Harwood Training Grant. These funds have been provided by OSHA so that we can offer chemical hazards training to workers and businesses in your community free of charge. This initiative aims to enhance workplace safety by educating workers and small business employers about chemical hazards to reduce the risk of chemical-related accidents and enhance the overall safety culture. Ideally, this will help keep workers safe and help employers stay compliant.

In February, MMUA received approval from OSHA to “take our show on the road,” and begin training workers around the upper Midwest on chemical safety and hazard communication. As of this writing, MMUA is making great progress and scheduling training all around the region. Working through

our network of hometown utility members, 12 communities have agreed to host these training events, reflecting widespread support and recognition of the importance of this program. The first sessions have been held in western Wisconsin and Mabel, among other communities.

**Benefits of the training**

The show of support from municipal utility towns underscores the value and importance of this type of educational program. By participating in this training, workers and employers who come in contact with chemicals, including those with limited English proficiency or low literacy levels, can gain valuable knowledge and skills at no cost.

As part of our accountability through the Susan Harwood Grant Program, MMUA is striving to provide this training to more than 1,300 individuals by September 30. While we can train any worker, including those working on farms, those self-employed, and those working for small businesses, our hope is to reach workers who may not otherwise have access to this important training. Ideally, when this is all done, those who receive the training are safer both at home and at work.

**Training content and objectives**

The one-hour training covers

a comprehensive range of topics essential for chemical hazard awareness and safety. Participants will learn to identify the hazards that occur when you work with chemicals, to understand the potential health impact, and to implement the best emergency practices. The training also provides information so that workers understand their rights under OSHA regulations. In addition, the training emphasizes hazard prevention and control measures to help ensure workers are well-equipped to recognize potential chemical hazards, so they can safely work with chemicals.

**A community engagement opportunity**

Some host communities have embraced these training sessions as prime opportunities for community engagement. Many are planning to enhance the experience by providing snacks and beverages during the events. Additionally, some communities are considering organizing tours of their maintenance shops after the training sessions. These tours will allow the public to see utility facilities and equipment up close, and families are encouraged to attend. Children will have the exciting opportunity to sit in plow trucks and other maintenance vehicles, making the event both educational and enjoyable for all ages.



Before the Susan Harwood-funded training on chemical safety begins, MMUA Safety Coordinator Brad Gunderson (standing left) takes a few minutes to explain the benefits of municipal utilities to attendees at the Mabel Community Center.

We hope you will consider:

- 1. **Hosting training events**—Communities can volunteer to host training sessions. This involves providing a venue and coordinating with MMUA to schedule the training. Hosting events help make the training more accessible to local workers and employers.
- 2. **Promoting participation**—Local governments and organizations can promote the training sessions to employers and workers in their area and to community members. This can be done through newsletters, social media, and community bulletin boards.
- 3. **Providing feedback**—After partic-

ipating in the training, communities can provide feedback to MMUA. This helps improve the training content and delivery for future sessions.

Keep in mind, there is no cost to the utility or to the participants for the training. The only limiting factors are that the training is intended for small businesses (250 employees or less) and the training must be accomplished by September 30, 2025.

For more information about this opportunity or to schedule this training, please visit our events page or contact Blaine Chaulklin at 763-746-0713.



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# Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave: What you need to know

By Shelly Dau, MMUA Director of Organizational Development and Human Resources

As we look ahead to 2026, Minnesota will introduce one of the most comprehensive paid family and medical leave programs in the country.

Set to take effect on January 1, 2026, this law will provide employees across the state with paid time off for a variety of important personal and family events. Minnesota will be the 13th state to implement a paid leave program.

### What is Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave?

The Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave program (PFML) is a state-run insurance program designed to provide employees with paid leave when they need to take time off due to personal illness, to care for a family member, or to address certain family-related events, such as the birth, adoption, or foster care placement of a child. The law provides job protections and partial wage replacement, paid by the state, to individuals who take leave for a qualifying condition.

This new law will offer employees up to 12 weeks of paid leave for various situations, including:

- **Personal health conditions:** Taking time off to recover from a serious illness or injury.
- **Family caregiving:** Caring for a family member with a serious health condition.

- **Parental leave:** Bonding with a new child, through birth, adoption, or foster care placement.
- **Safe leave:** Addressing situations like domestic violence or sexual assault.

It is important to note the medical leave is up to 12 weeks and the family leave is up to 12 weeks, with a 20-week combined maximum.

PFML covers most Minnesota employers with one or more employees including municipalities and local governments. The program also covers part-time and most seasonal employees. Employees of tribal nations or the federal government, as well as self-employed individuals who choose to provide their own coverage, are exempted from the program. However, self-employed individuals and independent contractors can choose to opt into the program.

Employees are eligible for Minnesota PFML if they work at least 50 percent of their time in Minnesota. If they work more than 50 percent of their time elsewhere, they must live in Minnesota at least 50 percent of the year.

The PFML program will be funded by premiums made up of contributions from employees and employers. Employees can receive up to 90 percent of their average weekly wage, capped at a maximum benefit based on the state's average weekly wage. The



exact benefit amount will depend on income levels.

### Intended benefits of the program

1. **Wage replacement:** One of the key features of this policy is the wage replacement it offers. With a cap of 90 percent of an employee's average weekly wage, individuals can rely on this benefit to manage financial needs while on leave.
2. **Broader access:** Unlike some company-specific leave programs, the Minnesota PFML program applies broadly across the state. It ensures that all eligible employees, regardless of their employer, have access to this benefit.
3. **Employee well-being:** With greater access to paid time off for medical needs or family care, workers will be able to focus on their health or their family's health without the stress of financial hardship.

### What employers need to know

To determine eligibility and benefit payment for employees

when PFML launches in January 2026, Minnesota employers need to report wage details for their employees with first reported data due October 31. Paid Leave will use the same online reporting system as Unemployment Insurance (UI) to make things easier for employers.

No additional steps are needed from Minnesota employers if all their employees are covered by UI, as the same account and quarterly wage detail reports will serve Paid Leave. If an employer has some or all of their employees not covered by UI, they may need to create an account to submit wage details.

When Paid Leave begins in 2026, the premium rate will be .88 percent. After the first year in 2026, the premium rate will be set annually. Employers may split the cost of premiums with employees. Employers must pay at least 50 percent of the total premium, though they may choose to cover 100 percent of the premium. Employers will be able to deduct the remainder from employee pay, up to 50 percent of the total premium. Deductions for Paid Leave will begin on January 1, 2026.

Additionally, while employers can offer their own paid leave programs, they cannot avoid using the state program and substitute their own policies unless the benefits are equivalent or greater. Such plans must also be approved by the state. In practice, the Minnesota PFML

program will serve as a baseline of benefits that all employers must meet.

### Important dates to remember

- **December 1, 2025:** By December 1, 2025, employers must inform their employees about their rights and benefits under this new program. Minnesota Paid Leave will provide materials, workplace notice posters, and other informational materials that employers can use to meet their requirements.
- **January 1, 2026:** The program officially takes effect. Employees can begin to access paid family and medical leave for qualifying reasons.

### Conclusion

The 2023 legislature intended Minnesota's Paid Family and Medical Leave program to be a major step forward in supporting workers' health and family needs. Starting in January 2026, this policy will provide financial security for those facing illness, caring for family members, or welcoming new children into their lives.

Visit the Paid Leave website at [mn.gov/deed/paidleave](https://mn.gov/deed/paidleave) to stay up-to-date on the latest developments. If you have any questions that are specific to how the program will affect municipal utilities, please contact Shelly Dau at [sdau@mmua.org](mailto:sdau@mmua.org).



**David A. Berg, PE - Principal**  
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## San Diego Community Power uses municipal aggregation to drop its generation rates for two years running

Customers of San Diego Community Power, the local community choice aggregator for the City of San Diego, delivered a pleasant surprise to its customers on February 7.



The Board of Directors for the organization said the generation charge for customers would drop 2.8 percent compared to last year. This is the second year in a row that San Diego Community Power has dropped its generation rates.

San Diego Community Power is a community choice aggregator, which is fairly commonplace in California. This type of aggregation, also called municipal aggregation, is currently authorized in 10 states. These programs allow local governments to procure power on behalf of their community, while still receiving transmission and distribution from the incumbent power provider. This choice allows communities and citizens to have more freedom with their choice of electricity sources and prices.

Since citizens in San Diego have choice, they can opt to have electricity delivered completely by the incumbent investor-owned utility, San Diego Gas & Electric. However, this choice would see them paying about 3 to 5 percent more on their generation rates.

In a statement, San Diego Community Power chair Paloma Aguirre said, "Community Power was founded to put people first, and these rates demonstrate our ongoing commitment to that mission. By lowering electricity charges two years in a row and creating real savings, we're proving that local control leads to better outcomes for working families."



**2.8%**



# What's happening in St. Paul

More than two months into the 2025 session, legislators in both chambers have been busy introducing bills.

As of March 17, the House had introduced 2365 bills while the Senate had introduced 2,691. However, neither chamber seems to be in a rush to hear a great number of bills, and it has so far been common for only one or two bills to be scheduled per committee hearing. There are exceptions, such as the Tax Committee and the Capital Investment (Bonding) Committee.

In the House, most of the bills heard early in the session have been authored by Republicans. This is not surprising, given that they held a one-seat majority until March 11 when DFLer David Gottfried won the special election to fill the vacancy in District 40B. When he was seated on March 17, it created a 67–67 tie. At that time committees started being co-chaired, and they are now populated by an equal number of committee members from each party. This will make it more difficult to get bills out of committee, as it will require a bipartisan effort. Until Representative Gottfried was seated, the Republicans could force a bill out of committee on a party-line vote. However, none of the bills passed out of committee in this manner can be passed off the House floor without at least one member of the other party voting for it. This is because a quorum is required, and the Minnesota Supreme Court has ruled that a quorum of the House is 68.

In the Senate, the decorum may appear better on the surface, but there is still frustration that

the DFL assumed full control once they had sworn in their 34th member, giving them a one-seat majority. In addition, the Energy Committee was briefly and understandably further slowed down following the death of Chair Nick Frentz's daughter.

Fortunately, bills of particular interest and importance to MMUA and its members have been included among the bills heard to date. These include:

- HF 9/SF 572, which would repeal the nuclear moratorium and allow hydro of any size to qualify as a carbon-free and renewable source of energy.
- HF 845/SF 1142, which would reform the net-metering statutes in a way MMUA believes would be more equitable and would reduce the incentive for anyone to overbuild a solar system for the purpose of selling the excess power to the utility provider at retail rates.
- HF 249 (no Senate companion) seeks to modify the definition of "carbon-free" to expressly include woody biomass.

MMUA's Director of Government Relations and Senior Counsel, Kent Sulem, testified in support of HF 9, which was approved on a party-line vote of the Energy Committee and rereferred to the Tax Committee. He actually testified twice; this was due to the action on the bill prior to a quorum having been established as defined by the Minnesota Supreme Court being voided by the Court's ruling. A second bill seeking to repeal the nuclear moratorium, HF 2002 (no Senate companion), authored

by Rep. Spencer Igo (R-Wabana Township), was introduced and became the official vehicle for the effort. Kent also testified in support of this bill.

Government Relations Attorney Bill Black testified in support of HF 845, which was approved by a party-line vote of 8–7 and sent to the General Register, which means it could be scheduled for a floor vote at any time, but no such vote is likely to occur in the near future because the bill would likely not get the required 68 votes at this time. The bill's author, Rep. Baker (R–Willmar), has stated that he intends to form an informal working group to try to negotiate a compromise that can garner bipartisan support. MMUA will participate in this effort, but we believe the bill as it passed out of committee already represents a fair middle ground on the issue since it neither ends net-metering nor lowers capacity requirements.

There has also been activity related to modifying Minnesota's Paid Family Leave Act (see full coverage of the PFML on page 13 of this issue of *The Resource*). This effort is also being led by Rep. Baker. HF 11/SF 2529 seeks to delay the starting date of the Act, carves out further exemptions, and modifies definitions. HF 11 was scheduled for a floor vote, but was tabled instead, meaning it is still alive and can be called up for a vote at any time, although passage is doubtful unless DFL support can be found. Even if passage is questionable, there are members of the DFL who will find it difficult to vote no, and the Republicans will likely turn a "no" vote into political fodder on the campaign trail. Rep.



Baker has also introduced HF2025 which seeks to modify the Earned Sick and Safe Time mandates passed in 2023 as well as several other bills taking aim at assorted leave benefits.

One reason only one or two bills are being heard in the House and Senate energy committees is that it has become common to see two dozen or so testifiers desiring to speak on every bill. Most testifiers have been in opposition to the bills they are addressing, and they have clearly been recruited to testify. The result of this packing of committee hearings is that testifiers only have between 90 seconds and two minutes to speak, and that is hardly enough time to present full and detailed comments on the issue at hand. While some may try to portray this practice as being what democracy is all about, it doesn't take long to realize that someone's goal is not to have a truly meaningful debate but to control the clock and overplay the opposition to the bill.

When not tracking and testifying on bills, the MMUA Government Relations team is busy meeting with legislators, colleagues from other utilities, and other stakeholders, to build

support for its objectives. In addition, active dockets at the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) have been taking more time than in past years. The Senate Energy Committee voted on February 26 to recommend confirmation by the full Senate of Audrey Partridge and Hwikwon Ham to be the newest MPUC commissioners. The committee recommended Commissioner Ham's appointment last year, but it was not approved by the full Senate due to the end-of-session chaos. Commissioner Partridge comes to the MPUC from the Center for Energy and the Environment (CEE).

Finally, March 6 was a very important date, as that was when the February State budget forecast was released. This forecast is what will determine budget (spending) targets for committees (if leaders can agree to such targets). The forecast calls for a short-term surplus of about \$456 million for the 2026–2027 fiscal biennium, with an expectation it will be followed by a nearly \$6 billion shortfall for the 2028–2029 fiscal biennium. Unknowns such as tariff wars will have an impact on the budget, but they are not reflected in the forecast.

## United Kingdom changes nuclear power plant siting rules

On February 6, the British government announced the United Kingdom (UK) would be changing the country's restrictions around nuclear power plant siting.

Currently, only eight sites in the UK are permitted sites for future nuclear power plants. The new rules will allow nuclear developers, including developers of small modular reactors, more freedom in locating their reactors. This move comes as the UK attempts to increase its supply of dependable, carbon-free baseload power to augment its thriving wind industry.

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# Former Appalachian coal mines to be site of solar energy and battery storage projects

On February 11, The Nature Conservancy and the Cumberland Forest Limited Partnership announced they would work with solar developer Sun Tribe Development and electric utility company ENGIE to construct 14 solar energy and three battery storage projects on the site of disused coal mines in the Appalachian Mountains.

ENGIE plans to develop 13 community-scale solar projects in Kentucky, Tennessee, and

Virginia. These developments will generate from one to six megawatts (MW). Sun Tribe will develop its projects in Virginia and Tennessee—one 5 MW solar generation project and three utility-scale battery storage systems that will range from 80 MW to 150 MW each.

The total capacity of the projects will eventually total approximately 49 MW of solar power and 320 MW of battery storage.

# Call for proposals

MMUA is excited to announce the 2025 MMUA Summer Conference in Rochester, Minnesota!

Please save the date for Monday, August 18–Wednesday, August 20. Registration will open in mid-May.

The Summer Conference is designed to offer useful information to managers, supervisors, crew leaders, commissioners, council members, and city staff about the upcoming challenges utilities are going to face with system reliability, technology, employee retention, and all it takes to keep a municipal utility ready to face the future. It is also designed to foster leadership development within the municipal utilities industry.

Our theme this year is **Utility leadership at the speed of change: balancing innovation and stability in a shifting landscape**. MMUA welcomes proposals that highlight:

- Advancements in electrical, gas, and water technologies and systems
- Managing change
- Maintenance and disaster recovery
- Distributed energy resources: opportunities and threats

- Financing and capital investment planning
- Energy storage options for small utilities
- Customer service excellence before, during, and after disruptions
- Carbon-free energy transition issues and answers
- Excellence in utility governance
- Supply-chain challenges and solutions
- Strategies for growing leaders and keeping talent
- Measuring and improving customer satisfaction
- Building and retaining the local workforce
- Pole attachment issues and negotiating strategies
- Promoting the value of local utility ownership and control
- Other topics relevant to successfully delivering municipal utility services in our region

### Important Information

- Submissions are due by April 10.

They can be entered through our online form at [mmua.questionpro.com/RFPSummer2025](http://mmua.questionpro.com/RFPSummer2025) or emailed to [kkos@mmua.org](mailto:kkos@mmua.org).

- Multiple submissions are welcome! Please complete the form for each topic or session you'd like to propose.
- You are welcome to share this invitation to suggest topics and speakers with colleagues who may be interested.
- All topics will be reviewed by MMUA staff during our conference planning meeting in late April.
- If a topic is chosen, we anticipate contacting speakers in May.
- If you have supporting documents you would like to submit with your proposal, please email your information to [kkos@mmua.org](mailto:kkos@mmua.org).

All content must conform to MMUA's policy on educational content as published on the MMUA website.

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# Central North Carolina wastewater plant, water operations detect dangerously high levels of cancer-causing chemical

On January 24, testing at the Asheboro Wastewater Treatment Plant in central North Carolina detected 2,200 parts per billion (ppb) of the chemical 1,4-dioxane in the city's wastewater.

Asheboro's water operators then found 3,520 ppb of the chemicals in the city's water supplies. The EPA considers 22 ppb the safe threshold for 1,4-dioxane in water.


Known as a "forever chemical," 1,4-dioxane is a likely human carcinogen that is used as a solvent for a variety of chemical applications. It breaks down slowly and poses long-term health risks. It can enter the water supply in several ways, one of which is when upstream wastewater treatment plants are not properly treating the water they receive from industrial users. Officials say Guilford County's drinking water is not currently affected by the high levels of 1,4-dioxane.

With the finding, the North



Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) notified wastewater plants in the nearby communities of Burlington, Greensboro, High

Point, and Reidsville. The DEQ plans to collaborate with these communities to decrease the level of this chemical in local water and wastewater.



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3 [www.bls.gov/oes/2017/may/oes472152.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/2017/may/oes472152.htm)



# Other duties as assigned: dealing with dead geese

In Minnesota's municipal utilities towns, hardly a day goes by when personnel are not asked to take care of a task that likely would not come up at a large investor-owned enterprise.

This spring, one of those unique chores in multiple towns is disposing of the carcasses of waterfowl that succumbed to Avian flu. Across certain areas of the state, sick birds apparently became entrapped near the edge of open water and froze into the ice on the lakes in late fall and winter. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recommended leaving the carcasses alone until the thaw.

During the week of March 10, MMUA's safety team was called in to assist in preparing one community's workers as they contemplated how to carry out this unsavory duty.

When we were called, the workers were hesitant with the assignment, which had fallen to a city department as the result of a council request. Nobody wanted to do it. Yet, the lakes were soon going to thaw, and the idea of those diseased and deceased birds ending up in the community's recreational water was not a great option either. MMUA was asked to help local management and workers come up with a plan to get the job done that would keep everyone safe.

In a discussion with the workers assigned to the job, employees raised the following concerns to their MMUA safety coordinator:

- Are the geese still infectious?
- What personal protective equipment (PPE) is required to handle the geese?
- How do we dispose of the carcasses?
- What if I do not want to risk the exposure? Can I say no due to safety concerns and not be in violation of an employer policy?
- When it comes to what to do, the DNR website says one thing, the Centers for Disease Control says something else, and the Minnesota Department of Health says another thing. Which source is best?

The utility personnel had reason to be concerned. Apart from driving up the cost of eggs at the grocery store, Avian flu has serious consequences. Globally, nearly 1,000 cases of Avian flu have been identified in humans who work with diseased birds. Of those, more than half have died— though an important distinguishing data point is that all the deceased workers were handling live birds or birds that had recently died, at the time of infection. The US has seen 70 cases of Avian flu in humans, with one death.

## RECOMMENDED PPE TO PROTECT AGAINST H5N1 BIRD FLU

- Head cover or hair cover
- Safety goggles
- Optional face shield over the top of goggles
- NIOSH Approved® particulate respirator (such as an N95®)
- Coveralls that keep you dry
- Optional waterproof apron over the top of coveralls
- Disposable gloves with optional outer work gloves
- Boot covers or boots



As the MMUA Safety Team swung into action, our coordinators drew upon past experiences with similar situations. For example, Joe Schmidt, Assistant Director of Workplace Safety Services, recalled an encounter with another avian disease when advising workers at the Soudan Underground Mine State Park. There, exposure to histoplasmosis was a concern. Histoplasmosis is a fungal infection caused by breathing in the disease spores from the feces of birds—and those spores can also be present on the carcasses of dead birds or on the surrounding ground. In this case, MMUA concluded that spring thaw conditions meant fecal matter on the dead geese would not be dry enough to become airborne, so the histoplasmosis risk is low. MMUA's research also established that the Avian flu virus associated with the carcasses would not likely be viable due to temperature swings recently.

Reliable sources indicate the Avian flu virus is hardy in cold environments, and it might be viable for as long as six months on frozen feathers. Once thawed, the virus appears only to be viable for around 20 days. During that period, a worker might contact it on feathers and in the body fluids of the dead geese. Based on this information, city staff and MMUA staff then compiled a list of PPE that everyone agreed would be protective. This included goggles, gloves, masks, boots, and waterproof outerwear. We also worked with management and local personnel to establish a protocol for the cleanup effort. Ultimately, it was determined that only geese on public property that could be safely reached from shore would be picked up and removed. This would occur using pitchforks to lift the carcasses into plastic bags that would eventually be buried per DNR recommendations. Finally, MMUA staff helped the



team work through the cleanup protocol and other precautions that would be necessary at the end of the shift to ensure everyone's safety going forward. This incident proved to be an excellent example of how MMUA's safety team can add value in working with a utility or city crew. MMUA, working as the trusted neutral party, was able to provide information that both management and staff agreed was credibly sourced, and to help develop a solution that both groups could agree made sense.

In the end, it was a tough day for this community facing a lake shore covered with frozen geese. Other cities in Minnesota are facing a similar challenge this year, and nobody looks forward to either the dangerous work or the stress of dealing with risks they didn't fully understand when asked to do the job. MMUA appreciates the opportunity to bring its team's expertise to help craft a solution that everyone can live with.

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High school students in **Albert Lea** were named third prize winners in C-SPAN's 21st annual StudentCam competition for their five-minute video "Energy in America." Featuring interviews with utility experts and political leaders from both parties, the piece addresses the assigned theme, "Your Message to the President: What issue is most important to you or your community?" For the southern Minnesota students, allowing nuclear energy to be part of the power mix is the answer. Their video and the other winners can be viewed at [studentcam.org](http://studentcam.org). C-SPAN recognized 145 of its 1,700 entries from 42 states in its March 12 announcement.



In early March, the **Brainerd City Council** denied a request from the **Brainerd Public Utilities Commission** to have a greater voice in the waiving of certain water and sewer fees in the city. The City is offering incentives in its central business district that allows for

waivers of sewer, water, building permit, and inspection fees to foster new development. The waivers can also be extended to the development of residential projects in the district. The Brainerd Commission sought authorization to review the forgiveness of the sewer and water availability charges on projects greater than \$150,000. Instead of approving the request, the Council passed a motion to include information on waived charges in the Commission's packets.

Minnesota is expected to experience minimal effects if Ontario Premier Doug Ford follows through on his threat to cut off electricity exports to three US states, including Minnesota. Mr. Ford warned such action was possible in a speech on March 4 as he responded to the Trump administration's sweeping tariffs on imports from Canada. **Minnesota Power (MP)** bought just under \$310,000 of electricity from Ontario's system in 2024 and bought none at all for eight months of that year, according to public filings. If tariffs are imposed as planned by the Trump administration, it is more likely they would affect MP's purchases of hydropower from Manitoba



Hydro. That source accounts for about 11 percent of MP's energy and would face tariffs of 10 percent. MP spent \$108 million on hydropower from Manitoba Hydro last year.

Delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Louis County officials were finally able to host a grand opening for **Virginia's** Government Services Center on February 25. The \$19 million building was under construction for 16 months and resulted in a highly energy-efficient structure designed for a long life cycle. The 63,000 square foot facility has a super-insulated shell, high performance windows, and a south-facing solar wall. It also has a white roof to help with air conditioning and a ground source heat system. According to local officials, the new-ish building is

about 50 percent larger than its predecessor but uses two-thirds less energy.

On March 17, the **Willmar City Council** got an update on the cost of extending utilities to land that Willmar Municipal Utilities (WMU) would like for its new headquarters. WMU hopes to purchase 27.1 acres of land east of the intersection of Willmar Avenue and the Highway 71/23 bypass on the east side of town. The cost of the land is \$600,000, but the cost of extending water and sewer to the site is around \$2.5 million. WMU General Manager Jeron Smith says WMU has considered several sites.

On February 27, **Elk River Municipal Utilities** welcomed three ISD 728 Zimmerman High School students for a job shadow day. This program gives students the opportunity to explore careers by working alongside staff in the field.

March 6 found **Rochester Public Utilities** linemen Landon Meier and Chase Holtorf attending the Blast to the Future career exploration event at the Boys & Girls Club, sharing their expertise with an electric safety demonstration. The event is a fun opportunity for kids to

learn about electrical safety and explore careers in the utility industry.



The first stop on the 2025 tour of We Are Water MN is Big Stone Lake in **Ortonville**. Hosted locally by the Big Stone Arts Council, the exhibit opened March 15 as part of the Ortonville Spring Expo. It featured a water bar, free nitrate well water testing, information and lead-free tackle from Get the Lead Out, and docent tours. The exhibit will be in Ortonville until April 21. We are Water MN is a traveling exhibit and community engagement initiative that explores Minnesotans' relationship with water. It is funded in part with money from the Clean Water, Land & Legacy Fund, created by Minnesota voters in 2008.

## Tariffs will likely affect energy sector, transformer availability, and cost

**On February 4, President Donald Trump's tariff of 10 percent on all Chinese imports to the United States was met with retaliatory tariffs from the Chinese government.**

On February 10, China placed a 15 percent tax on coal and liquefied natural gas imports, with crude oil facing a 10 percent tariff. China also moved to restrict the export of five critical minerals that are used in electrical products, including tungsten and tellurium.

The tariffs are of particular concern to states that are producers of these fuels, including West Virginia, which produces the most coal for Chinese export of any state. The Chinese tariff on liquefied natural gas and oil is expected to have a minimal impact on both countries, but it is expected to change the trade flows of both commodities through the world economy.

Closer to home, the transformer shortage Minnesota's municipal utilities have been experiencing may get worse because of the new tariffs. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) says around 55 percent of in-service

distribution transformers are more than 33 years old and will need to be replaced soon. Because of this, distribution transformer capacity might need to increase 160 percent to 260 percent by 2050 compared with 2021 levels to meet demand according to NREL.

Only about 20 percent of transformer demand can be met by the domestic supply chain. The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reports American suppliers have "been reluctant to invest large sums of capital to expand production capacity [for transformers] because such investments have long break-even timelines," referring to data from a Wood Mackenzie report. Wood Mackenzie estimates that transformer prices have already risen between 70 percent and 100 percent since January 2020 due to inflation for raw materials, such as electrical steel and copper.

The WSJ also reports that in 2024, China accounted for more than 32 percent of US low-voltage transformer equipment imports, and Mexico accounted for 36 percent of high-voltage transformer imports. Canada accounted for about 16 percent of US imports of high-voltage

switchgear and 100 percent of imported utility poles. With the new tariffs, costs to import these things will rise, putting pressure on utilities and creating downstream costs for consumers.

The tariffs and their downstream effects may also negatively affect the solar and battery storage sectors. Increased tariffs on Chinese solar cells and lithium-ion batteries could raise costs, making it even more difficult to reach Minnesota's carbon free goals.

One bright side is the higher costs may result in re-shoring production of these vital items in the long run. That won't solve immediate supply and price pressure, though, and ramping up production will also increase the country's long-term power demand. Onshoring also won't address the need for raw materials, including metals the US does not have in abundance. In short, the new world of tariffs and retaliation can be expected to increase operational costs, disrupt supply chains, and further challenge utilities in states like Minnesota where the transition to renewable energy is continuing.

## Hilo's mayor issues emergency proclamation on potential failure of Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant



**On February 11, Hilo, Hawaii, Mayor Kimo Alameda signed a proclamation to authorize emergency efforts if the Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant fails.**

Assessments at the plant have found widespread deterioration. Hilo is the State of Hawaii's fourth largest city and the county seat of the Big Island of Hawaii.

Alameda said, "It is our duty to protect the health and safety of our residents as well as our environment. By moving forward

with repairs and upgrades to our Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant, we are making critical investments in our infrastructure that will serve the community for years to come."

The plant was built in 1996 and has not seen major updates since that time. A notice to proceed is expected at the plant in March, which will allow important upgrades and repairs to start. The rehabilitation process is expected to take about five years.



US welcomes its first public hydrogen utility

The cities of Lancaster and Industry, California, have joined forces to create the first public hydrogen utility in the US.

The utility, called “First Public H2,” began operations in December 2024, and will work to transform the buying and selling of hydrogen by making costs transparent to producers as well as customers. Hydrogen producers for the utility will include solar, wind, and renewable natural gas producers. By doing this, they hope to drive down prices and help more customers adopt hydrogen for everyday use. Customers for the new utility include other utilities, transit companies, the private sector, and cities.

Deliveries of hydrogen are expected to begin in late 2025 or early 2026.

Small modular reactor to do double duty in Texas



A new small modular nuclear reactor under development at Abilene Christian University in Texas is being designed to do two things at the same time—generate electricity and desalinate water.

The reactor is of a molten salt type, where molten salts power the reactor and also cool it. The reactor will generate 250 megawatts of electricity. During the power generation process, heat created from fission travels through a cooling loop, where it is used to desalinate water.

The reactor is being developed by Natura Resources, a company that specializes in small modular reactors. The reactor is under construction and is expected to come online in 2026 or 2027.

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On February 5, three of Arizona's largest electric utilities, Arizona Public Service (APS), Salt River Project, and Tucson Electric Power, said in a press release they would be interested in pursuing emerging nuclear technologies in the state. APS will lead the work to understand new nuclear technologies and seek sites for the development of nuclear power plants in Arizona.

In mid-February, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh announced the country would begin implementing the country's "Coal-fired Power Transition to Clean Energy," which will see all of Vietnam's coal-fired power plants convert to clean fuels or use carbon capture technology by 2050.

*Interesting Engineering* reported on February 17 that the first standard-sized photovoltaic windows have been manufactured by California's Next Energy Technologies. The windows are approximately three feet by five feet and are completely transparent because they use carbon-based semiconductors instead of traditional semiconductors. The new type of semiconductor can capture different spectrums of light, are more Earth-friendly, and are less costly than traditional photovoltaics.

On February 19, *The Plain Dealer* reported that over the past decade, Ohioans have had to pay \$679 million in fees on their power bills to subsidize losses incurred by two coal plants owned by three Ohio-based power companies.

On February 19, GE Vernova announced their new LM-6000VELOX gas turbine and generator had come online for the first time commercially at Dominion Energy's Bushy Park Combustion Turbine in South Carolina. The package was first introduced in 2023 and was created with the goal of shrinking the installation and commissioning schedule by 40 percent compared to prior gas turbine/generator packages.

In a bipartisan effort, senators from Utah, California, and Colorado reintroduced a bill on March 5 that would amend federal tax law to exempt homeowners from paying income taxes on rebates received from water utilities for water conservation and runoff management efforts. The Water Conservation and Rebate Parity Act would encourage homeowners to invest in water-saving and flood-prevention improvements. The western US has been dramatically affected by drought and water supply issues in recent years.

Electric vehicles made up 7.6 percent of new auto sales in the US during February, according to Wards' Infobank and Deutsche Bank Research, down slightly from January, but up 15 percent in volume over 2024. Plug-in hybrids made up another 1.8 percent of sales.

A February 2025 study from Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment suggests that utilities can already handle the expected 21.5 percent increase in demand for electricity over

the next decade. Modeling suggests that demand growth can be accommodated most of the year without substantial investment in new generation. Load shifting and other tactics could reduce the amount of new generation that needs to be built, according to the study entitled *Rethinking Load Growth: Assessing the Potential for Integration of Large Flexible Loads by US Power Systems*. It is available for review at [nicholasinstitute.duke.edu](https://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu).

On February 25, the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) announced it was giving up the rulemaking power it has had since 1977 to direct how agencies should follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Although changes will likely be forthcoming, agencies have been directed to continue using existing NEPA rules as guidance until the Trump administration provides replacement guidance. Agencies will also need to stay within boundaries established by decades of case law concerning compliance with NEPA.

On March 4, voters in Decorah, Iowa, again rejected a proposed measure to form a municipal utility. The measure failed when 54 percent of those voting in the special election said the city should not take steps to break away from longtime provider Alliant Energy. Voters also voted down a similar measure in 2018, that time by only three votes. Watch *The Resource* next month for more extensive coverage of Decorah's journey to attempted municipalization.

Council members for the City of Ann Arbor, Michigan, rejected a proposed allocation of \$1.7 million

to fund a feasibility study on forming a municipal utility. The vote was 5-5, and the measure required a majority to pass. Local activists were reportedly "surprised and upset" at the outcome, according to WEMU News. Their leader, Brian Geiringer, says they will try to get the municipal utility question on the November 2026 ballot instead.

Rhode Island Energy must pay nearly \$8 million due to an alleged fraud scheme by its predecessor, National Grid. The Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission announced the settlement on March 5, closing a years-long investigation. In December 2021 it was determined that that National Grid knowingly misfiled invoices for its energy efficiency program over an eight-year period, overcharging customers as much as \$2.2 million.

In March, NRG Energy in Houston, Texas, announced plans to build four new natural gas plants over the next several years. The energy they produce will be used to power artificial intelligence data centers across the country. The plants are expected to produce more than 6 gigawatts of power, and the first one, slated for Baytown, Texas, should come online in 2029. The remaining plants will be located in Wharton and Greens Bayou, Texas. They should be completed by 2032.

Electric Autonomy Canada says the country saw a 24.2 percent increase in public charging stations for electric vehicles (EVs) between March 2024 and March 2025. Citing data from Natural Resources Canada, the report says Canada now has 12,955 charging stations and 33,767

chargers, roughly one charger for every 2.24 electric vehicles in Canada. Of those 6,309 are fast chargers. The US has around 64,000 charging stations with more than 207,000 charging ports as of January 2025 for its 5.7 million electric vehicles—just one port per every 27.54 EVs.

Research from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air and Global Energy Monitor has found that Chinese coal-fired power plant construction starts reached their highest level since 2015 last year, with 94.5 gigawatts (GW) of coal plants starting construction. In 2015, the figure reached 84.3 GW. China also approved 66.7 GW of new coal capacity last year. Experts say part of the drive toward coal in 2024 was due to the Chinese government's plan to begin decreasing coal use in its 2026-2030 five-year plan.

On February 10, Finnish power generation manufacturer Wärtsilä announced the release of its new power generation engine, the large bore 46TS. The engine is engineered to work alongside renewable generation sources, with the ability to reach full power in two minutes. The engine outputs 23.4 megawatts per unit and is 51 percent efficient. It is also designed to run on sustainable fuels. The first company to order this new model is a hybrid power project in Kazakhstan, which will combine the engine with wind and solar for maximum efficiency of their local power operations.

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# Firm to build wastewater treatment plant for cooling world’s largest AI supercomputer



An artificial intelligence (AI) company owned by Elon Musk has built the world’s largest AI supercomputer, called “Colossus,” in Memphis, Tennessee.

Now, the company plans to construct its own wastewater

treatment plant to provide grey-water to help cool the supercomputer and provide wastewater treatment services. On February 3, the company bought land for the treatment plant from the City of Memphis. The \$78 million facility, called the “Colossus Water Recycling

Plant,” will help Colossus stay cool as it expands to one million graphic processing units of capacity. The computer, which came online in December of last year, is attempting to create AI that can do advanced mathematical reasoning.

# FERC data shows renewable energy accounted for more than 90 percent of new US electrical generating capacity

On February 6, data released by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) showed that more than 90 percent of the United States’ new 2024 electrical generating capacity came from renewable sources. For 2024, solar power added 30,816 megawatts (MW) of new generation, with wind adding 3,128 MW. Hydropower added 213 MW, biomass 51 MW, and

geothermal 29 MW. With renewables reaching 90.5 percent of all new generation, fossil fuels and nuclear only accounted for 9.5 percent. This included 1,100 MW of new nuclear generation, 2,428 MW of natural gas, 28 MW of “other,” 13 MW of coal, and 11 MW of oil. FERC also reported that renewables now account for 31 percent of total US generating capacity.



## Upcoming events

### Underground School

May 6-9  
MMUA Training Center  
Marshall, MN

This course offers hands-on technical training for line-workers of all skill levels.

We hope you can take advantage of this opportunity to engage in training activities that safely simulate real-world scenarios. New for 2025 is the option to take either a multi-session class or an advanced class.

The multi-session class will offer hands-on training in a variety of work activities:

- Cable pulling
- Leaking transformer changeout
- 600-amp terminations
- Others currently under development

The advanced class offers concentrated training on equipotential grounding and the isolation method. This class will dive into:

- Changes in the APPA Safety Manual
- The science behind equipotential grounding as the safest way to ground
- Various hands-on activities using equipotential grounding and the isolation method

Register by April 11, 2025 for the best rate. Advance registration ends April 25, 2025. Visit [mmua.org/events](http://mmua.org/events) for more information or to register.

### Competent Person and Excavation Safety Workshop

May 20-21  
MMUA Training Center  
Marshall, MN

This course is intended for public works personnel, water/wastewater personnel, lineworkers, engineering personnel, contract workers, and others involved with underground utility or infrastructure work.

The OSHA Construction Standard (29 CFR 1926.32) defines a “competent person” as someone who is:

- Capable of identifying existing and predicable hazards in the surroundings, or
- Working conditions which are unsanitary, hazardous, or dangerous to employees, and
- Who has authorization to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate them.

In this workshop, participants engage in classroom discussion and hands-on activity to:

- Increase your understanding of the “competent person” role on the job site
- Demonstrate correct soil-testing procedures
- Identify hazards associated with trenching and excavating
- Increase knowledge of different types of protective systems
- Further develop proper “pot holing” practices for gas and powerline excavation

Register by April 24 for the best rate. Advance registration ends May 9. Visit [mmua.org/events](http://mmua.org/events) for more information or to register.

### Minnesota Public Power Walleye Tournament

Saturday, May 31  
Bladow Beach Resort & Campground  
Ottertail, MN

We are excited to announce registration is now open for the Minnesota Public Power Walleye Tournament. This annual event brings together employees, retirees, suppliers, and friends of Minnesota’s municipal utilities and electric cooperatives—many of whom return year after year to enjoy the friendly competition and the camaraderie.

**All proceeds are donated to the three post-secondary electrical line work programs in Minnesota.**

- The event kicks off with an informal social gathering and fish fry the evening of Friday, May 30, for those able to attend.
- Cash prizes and tournament plaques are awarded to the six top-placing teams, as well as to the individual with the largest walleye.
- There is a limit of 50 teams and two people per team/boat.

**Tournament sponsors: Bell Lumber & Pole Company, Border States Electric Supply Company, Irby Company, The Okonite Company, Primus Marketing Group, RESCO**

Deadline to register is May 15. Visit [mmua.org/events](http://mmua.org/events) for more information or to register.

For more information, see the Events Calendar at [www.mmua.org](http://www.mmua.org) or call MMUA at 763-551-1230.