

THE RESOURCE

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Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association



Hometown services.
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Hometown solutions.

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Hometown utilities leverage Cold Weather Rule and energy assistance programs to keep Minnesota warm

Most utilities professionals know that Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule (CWR) is a state law that keeps utility customers from having their electricity or gas service shut off between October 1 and April 30.

The CWR does not prevent disconnection but requires utilities to take several steps before doing so. Working hand-in-hand with the CWR is the Energy Assistance Program (EAP), which provides heating assistance to Minnesotans who struggle to pay their winter energy bills. With the help of these two programs, municipal utilities teams around the state go to great lengths to help ratepayers stay warm and address the challenges that sometimes make paying a utility bill difficult.

In a December *Minnesota Star Tribune* op-ed—republished in the last issue of *The Resource*—Minnesota's utility-related nonprofit organizations, including MMUA, called for an



Hutchinson Utilities office staff help make all year merry for their customers.

extension of the EAP so that its benefits would apply all year. This important move would help prevent shutoffs when CWR protections end on April 30, assist utilities in reducing unpaid accounts, and make it easier for

ratepayers to overcome life's bumps in the road even if they happen during the summer cooling season and not the dead of winter.

MMUA reached out to representatives of the Hutchinson

Utilities Commission (HUC), Travis Schmidt, General Manager at Moorhead Public Service (MPS), and Leslie Hisken, Customer Service Manager at Marshall Municipal Utilities (MMU), to learn about how they

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Developing Utility Expertise and Leadership™ (DUEL™) is here!

By Shelly Dau

One of the resounding themes in feedback MMUA has received about municipal utility workforce needs is this: there are a lot of retirements coming up, and there is increased competition for talent in the utility sector.

How will municipal utilities find and train the right leaders? Whether a promotion from within advances a person who needs to learn new leadership skills, or a utility brings in an established leader who is unfamiliar with the municipal environment, MMUA has heard members loud and clear regarding the gap in available training.

For the past two years, MMUA has been in the process of studying this issue and designing a program specifically to address the leadership training needs faced by municipal utilities. Now, we are pleased to introduce DUEL: Developing Utility Expertise and Leadership.

MMUA's DUEL program has been designed to help foster practical skills and to cultivate the next generation of leaders. DUEL's lineup of courses will equip current and emerging leaders with the skills, knowledge, and networks they need to succeed in an ever-evolving hometown utilities environment. By combining a utility focus, real-world case studies, and peer collaboration, DUEL will build a cohort of leaders capable of tackling the most pressing challenges.

DUEL offers a comprehensive approach to leadership development to address these multifaceted challenges, combining technical knowledge with strategic decision-making and people management skills.

Key Features of DUEL

1. The program is hometown-utility-specific and highly customizable. All participants

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MMUA's 2025 State Legislative Priorities

By Kent Sulem

At its December meeting, MMUA's Board of Directors approved a list of issues it would like to see addressed by the 2025 Minnesota state legislature.

This list reflects the input of members, suggestions from joint power agencies, review by the Government Relations Advisory Group, and advice from staff. While the list is comprehensive, MMUA knows that other issues will arise that need MMUA's attention. The overall impact and expected costs are the general guides MMUA uses to set its priorities and response to legislative proposals introduced during the session.

MMUA encourages members to use this list when meeting with their legislators, as well as when meeting with key committee members. Questions about the issues on this list, or about other issues you believe will impact

municipal utilities, should be directed to Kent Sulem or Bill Black.

Issue: The state's nuclear moratorium prevents meaningful discussions regarding the possible use of nuclear power to meet the carbon-free by 2040 mandate.

Ask: Repeal any legislative and/or administrative ban on the possible siting and use of new nuclear power in Minnesota so that a meaningful discussion of all relevant issues can take place.

Issue: Reform net-metering statutes to (a) establish a more equitable compensation rate; and (b) reduce the total size of generating facilities eligible for net-metering from 40 to 20 kilowatts.

Ask: MMUA will join the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) to draft legislation to (a) reduce the rate electricity-

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The debate over biomass heats up

By Kent Sulem

Many MMUA members, particularly in northern Minnesota, may have recently read an editorial calling for biomass to be excluded from energy sources considered to be carbon-free.

This editorial follows an unsuccessful effort to have the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) reconsider

their order of November 7, 2024, which established a separate docket to further flesh out how biomass and other sources may qualify to be carbon-free using a life-cycle analysis.

MMUA joined with a majority of parties who submitted comments on the issue when it was first considered by the PUC, supporting the creation of the separate

docket. MMUA supports the establishment of a life-cycle analysis protocol that would allow biomass to be reviewed as a possible source of carbon-free energy. MMUA will continue to follow this issue closely and will submit comments to the PUC as deemed appropriate.



Supreme Court leaves New York's low-income broadband law in place

On December 16, the United States Supreme Court decided not to hear an appeal brought by the broadband industry that would have challenged New York's low-income broadband law.

The state's Affordable Broadband Act gives low-income subscribers monthly rates of \$20 for download speeds of at least 200 megabits per second and \$15 for lower speeds.

Industry brought the case to

the Court because of concerns that similar laws could be implemented in other states. Arguments in lower courts upheld the law because states can regulate broadband prices under existing telecommunications law.

Otter Tail Power Company to move forward on two solar facilities

Two solar projects that will bring 345 megawatts of solar power to Northern Minnesota and North Dakota are underway as Otter Tail Power Company asked the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission for cost recovery estimates on the projects.

The first solar installation will be located northwest of Wahpeton, North Dakota, near the Minnesota-North Dakota border. This 295-megawatt (MW) facility, known as the Flickertail Solar Project, was previously under development by another energy developer. Otter Tail plans to buy this development and take it on as its own. The second solar



installation will be built near Solway, Minnesota, which is just west of Bemidji. This 50-MW solar farm will be developed by Otter Tail from scratch.

Flickertail is expected to come

online by 2028, while the Solway Solar development is expected to be completed by 2026. Otter Tail estimates that 57 percent of its power generation will come from renewable sources by 2030.

Utilities in the lobby

When asked to consider the pantheon of individuals who should be remembered for their contributions to utilities systems in the United States, most people can easily come up with a few names.

Thomas Edison, who founded the electric power industry, is certainly one of them. George Westinghouse, who promoted alternating current as well as developed early natural gas distribution and metering systems, is another. Ben Franklin—in between forming the post office, signing the Declaration of Independence, and representing our new country overseas—was one of the earliest advocates for public water systems.

On the other hand, how often do you hear Samuel Insull mentioned in casual conversation? How about Thomas Fortune Ryan or John Martin? Neither they nor the many others largely known for their lobbying efforts on behalf of investor-owned utilities (IOUs) are remembered by name, but some would argue that how customers receive and pay for utility services in 2025 is as much the result of their work as that of Edison, Westinghouse, and Franklin. That lobbyists—then and now—have been so influential is not something that makes a lot of people happy.

Lobbying on behalf of utilities can generally be traced to the formation of investor-owned businesses proffering utility-related services. As the industrial

age gave us gas and electrical systems, lobbyists soon appeared to represent the owners of those technologies and to advocate for systems that would be profitable. For example:

- Samuel Insull, an Edison associate and billionaire utility tycoon who helped found General Electric, pushed for the regulated monopoly model that allowed his firm to grow exponentially with little competition. It's not by accident that "Electric Company" showed up on the Monopoly board in 1934 and remains there to this day.
- Thomas Fortune Ryan, a wealthy and often distrusted businessman in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, shaped the development of American gas and electric infrastructure. He was involved in the creation and expansion of utility monopolies such as Con Ed—still the provider of electricity in the eastern US—and he lobbied to ensure that utility companies had the authority to operate with minimal oversight.
- John Martin, the co-founder of Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), engaged in lobbying efforts that helped secure his company's monopolistic control over electricity distribution in northern California, secured favorable regulations for his firm, and blocked competition.

He also created a company culture that some blame for PG&E's many safety and quality problems yet today.

Here in Minnesota, modern utilities began cropping up as early as the 1870s. Ada formed the first municipal electric utility in 1876, followed by Ortonville in 1881, Springfield in 1884, and Le Sueur in 1885. In Minneapolis, investor-owned concerns brought natural gas streetlamps in 1879 and electric lights in 1882, well before the 1893 Chicago World's Fair made lighting up a town fashionable. All these utilities, and many others that started in Minnesota over the next 20 years or so, were formed and run largely without regulations in those early days.

When you don't have many regulations, you don't need many lobbyists. The free market runs its course, usually characterized by a mixture of progress and profiteering. Hence, during the first 25–30 years of offering utility services, Minnesota had few professional utility advocates. (This still happens. Consider how the internet evolved without much regulation, and consequently, there weren't nearly as many internet lobbyists as popped up once officials started talking about net neutrality, broadband standards, and bans on Tik Tok.)

By 1907, in a state where regulation was lacking, plenty of communities had had struggles with delivering suitable utility

From My Desk to Yours

Karleen Kos
MMUA CEO



services to their towns. So, the Minnesota legislature passed a law to address the situation. It spelled out the structure and enacted safeguards by which municipal utilities may be formed, governed, and paid for. You can still read it at revisor.mn.gov, and if you do that, you will find provisions that have stood the test of time. For example, the power of local elected officials to make "needful rules and regulations ... including the power to fix and prescribe rates and charges," the requirement that "the books of account for such public utility [must be kept] distinct from other city accounts," as well as the requirement that citizens be allowed to vote on the formation of a municipal utility, all date back to this law.

The extent to which professional lobbyists representing IOUs and privately-owned companies faced off with local volunteers representing small municipalities to hammer out the 1907 Minnesota law is lost to history. All you have to do is read the statute to be sure the senators and representatives in St. Paul did not dream up the final language all on their own.

What we do know is that by the early 1930s, the industry had matured, and the dire circumstances of the Great Depression put financial pressures on utilities. At the same time, IOUs and municipalities were in a war over the future of the electric industry. The IOUs had money and power that Minnesota's small towns couldn't match. So, in 1931, the Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association (MMUA) was born.

In effect, MMUA was formed for lobbying purposes, though we didn't have the services of a professional lobbyist until 1967, and we didn't hire our first full time executive director until

1975. Having a big footprint wasn't the point. MMUA members wanted to make an impact in St. Paul for their towns and their ratepayers. As today, they didn't have a lot of money, and they didn't have profit in mind. They were a group of passionate volunteer lobbyists who carried messages to St. Paul for the betterment of the folks back home. From the beginning, MMUA's representatives were up against IOUs that brought powerful trade association money and professional lobbyists to stand against them.

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Although today MMUA has two professional lobbyists full-time in St. Paul, works cooperatively with lobbyists representing Minnesota's nonprofit joint action agencies, and often collaborates with like-minded lobbyists representing other community-owned utility concerns, we are still "the little guys" when it comes to the resources we can bring to the table. Keep this in mind as you read what I'm about to share.

A few recent developments underscore the public's displeasure with utility lobbying.

1. In February 2024, HF 4292 was introduced at the Minnesota legislature. While the bill never made it out of committee, it called for a ban on allowing public utilities to recover the costs for lobbying and membership dues being paid to trade associations from ratepayers. Such a law wouldn't have affected municipal utilities or MMUA legally, but it would have been something our ratepayers heard about through the media. They would have wanted to know why they were still paying dues to an association. Offering our first explanation under those conditions would have been, well, awkward ... and it probably would have seemed disingenuous to be defending our collective lobbying only after a law preventing IOUs from doing it was enacted. Similar laws have been passed in other states, so I doubt we have heard the end of this banning association dues idea.

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Hometown utilities leverage Cold Weather Rule (CWR)

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take care of their neighbors and keep them informed about these lifesaving programs.

Community education

Informing customers about the upcoming CWR period is important for all municipal utilities to help smooth out the process. “We send a bill stuffer as a mandatory notice at least 30 days prior to the start of CWR coverage,” says Travis Schmidt. “Information is also included in mailings to customers who are covered by the CWR when subject to disconnection.”

At HUC, they follow a similar process, with CWR brochures mailed out with monthly bills and disconnect notices from September to March. “CWR information is also placed on social media and HUC’s website,” says Jeremy Carter, General Manager at HUC. “In addition, HUC staff take every opportunity they can—whether in person, over the phone, or by email—to educate customers about the CWR, the shutoff process, and how to avoid being disconnected. We try to provide as many options as possible to avoid disconnection.”

Leslie Hisken at MMU also details a strong community education process. “Customers are notified about the CWR with a bill insert which is also sent via email if applicable. Additionally, on a monthly basis throughout the months beginning October 1 and ending April 30...MMU places notification of the MN CWR rules rights and responsibilities, local energy assistance providers, a third-party notification form, and an application for Winter Disconnect Protection & Inability to Pay Declaration Form with every notice of payment due. For new customers, MMU explains our disconnection/shutoff process for nonpayment when customers begin utility services.”

Complexities of the rule

The CWR is not always easy to understand for customers, even with outreach. For instance, it is not universal knowledge that the protection of CWR does not totally prevent disconnection. “HUC’s strategy is to take a hands-on, proactive approach, educating customers when they call in with a question about past-due balances or [when they] realize they have been included on the disconnection list,” says Jeremy. “Budget plans and EAPs are discussed with customers.”

“MPS follows state requirements and uses additional strategies to continue to remind and inform customers, including notices by mail and phone calls to customers,” says Travis. “(An interesting part of) state requirements are that they only apply to residences where



Moorhead Public Service customer service staff helps educate customers about the CWR and other energy assistance options.

disconnection service would affect the primary heat source.”

With disconnections, more information is literally power. “The CWR information that is shared with our customers outlines in detail the conditions that must be met to avoid disconnection,” says Leslie.

Energy Assistance Program

For customers needing help with energy bills, the EAP is invaluable to families. A family of four with an income up to

\$68,845 can qualify for the program, which provides payments that are sent directly to the customer’s utility company. The problem is connecting the people who need the program with EAP. “MPS has a long-standing relationship with local assistance agencies,” says Travis. MPS constantly updates contact information so that the correct phone numbers and email addresses for assistance programs reach their customers.

MMU is in contact daily with

EAP. “We work with them all the time regarding customers who are seeking assistance,” says Leslie.

HUC works with assistance agencies to make sure they are reaching the people they need to reach as well. “Our customer service staff works closely with EAP providers by sharing with them the information they need to make their determinations (to connect people with services),” says Jeremy. “We also share literature and contact informa-

tion given by the providers to customers in need of assistance.”

Weatherization Assistance Program

A partner program of the EAP is the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). This program offers families of four making up to \$62,822 assistance with cost-effective energy efficiency improvements. Assistance is available to homeowners and renters alike.

“HUC has seen some modest positive effects from this program,”

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Hometown utilities leverage Cold Weather Rule

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Marshall Municipal Utilities' office staff are proud to provide hometown service to their customers.

says Jeremy. "Unfortunately, there is a greater need that is not being met because many customers simply don't qualify or lack the available funds needed for portions of the energy improvement project."

"We work directly with one of the assistance agencies with regard to appliance replacements based on energy efficiency requirements," says Travis. "MPS refers customers to them

and other assistance agencies for additional help."

Budget Billing

A solution that helps some customers is budget billing. The program spreads utility payments over a 12-month period to smooth out the peaks and valleys of utility bills over a year. MMU, MPS, and HUC all offer this program.

"MPS offers an equalized

payment plan product to our customers who have been living at a unit for over 12 months," says Travis. "Customers who utilize the program and have their monthly payments made through MPS's automated payment program do keep up with payments. Out of 479 enrolled customers, only about 10 struggle with receiving cutoff notices."

"MMU does offer a budget billing plan," says Leslie. "The plan

seems to work for the majority that choose to sign up for it."

HUC also offers budget billing and has seen success with it. "This is very helpful to a lot of HUC customers," says Jeremy. "It provides customers with an easier way to manage their bills."

Disconnections

Disconnections of service are hard on everyone: the customer, the customer's family, and utility staff. That is why utilities always try to avoid this worst-case scenario. If a disconnection is required, both HUC and MPS noted that they strive to treat all customers fairly and equally when it comes to the process. "MPS has a formal collection process that all customer service staff use to ensure all customer accounts are treated similarly," says Travis.

"MMU has processes and procedures documented, and provides hands-on training to all staff that have a role in utility disconnections," says Leslie. "Each customer situation can be unique, so training seems to be the best way to go."

"Meter disconnecting (teams) are on the same page," says Jeremy. "Teamwork and frequent communication between departments during those times of the

month ensure a smooth process." By having all their ducks in a row, utilities make sure they treat all customers the same and follow the tenets of the law.


HUC is slowly integrating more remote disconnect meters into their system. "By doing so, it will greatly reduce the time spent manually disconnecting and reconnecting meters, which also helps restore services to customers quicker when the meter is shut off for various reasons," says Jeremy. Not only do these meters get customers connected more quickly, but they also protect utility staff from a hard and sometimes dangerous job.

Keeping the energy on is not always going to be guaranteed, but in Minnesota, we try to make sure people can stay connected. "Minnesota generally speaking is pro-rate payer for many good reasons," says Jeremy. "Providing additional options for payment or exclusions from payment... before disconnecting a customer becomes a real possibility."


Thank you to all of the utility staff and energy assistance employees who work to keep the lights on for as many people as possible.

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Developing Utility Expertise and Leadership

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will take a series of in-person foundations courses beneficial for any role of influence and responsibility. These required courses will be offered face-to-face, in three two-day sessions over about a year. This format will allow deep dives into content, experiential learning, and the chance to build relationships with a network of peers.

This foundational knowledge will be supplemented by a wide variety of elective courses offered remotely. Participants will be able to select a group of elective courses that best matches their needs and interests, tailoring their content to the needs of their utility and their own skill development.

2. The foundational in-person core curriculum provides an in-depth understanding of utility leadership topics, setting the stage with an overview of the utility landscape and the unique challenges of leading a municipal utility. The program will then focus on the essential skills necessary for leaders, including strategic leadership, project management, and navigating different types of change. The final phase of the core curriculum focuses on application and teamwork. This will include leadership communication and creating a culture for high-performing teams. The in-person coursework will conclude with an interactive capstone project.

3. DUEL's wide variety of elective courses—offered via Zoom—will initially include topics like effective employee interviewing, HR basics, navigating the transition to leadership, critical thinking/decision-making, crisis management, community and government relations,

stakeholder engagement, cyber security, bonding and financial tools, grant writing, and working with councils and commissions.

4. To receive a DUEL certificate and ongoing access to additional tools and networks, participants in the DUEL program will complete the foundations courses along with five electives of their choice. These may be completed in approximately one year, but the electives can be spread over up to two years in order to accommodate individual interests and needs.

5. Expert faculty and industry leaders will provide real-world insights and share best practices.

6. Peer collaboration and networking are core strengths of the DUEL program. Participants will engage in interactive case studies that foster a collaborative learning environment. This allows leaders and faculty to share experiences, discuss challenges, and create lasting professional relationships with peers who face similar issues in their respective utilities.

The DUEL program emphasizes real-world application. Whether developing a resilience plan to be applied in the case of a natural disaster or implementing a new customer engagement strategy, participants will be prepared to put their learning into practice.

7. Upon completing DUEL and receiving their certificate, leaders will be eligible for ongoing engagement in a facilitated peer group of leaders. Continuing education and access to resources will be built in. After the first bienni-

um, a modest biennial fee will help certificate holders keep current with the latest information and skills, and they will also have early access to MMUA's future courses.

Municipal Utility Leaders Benefits

DUEL will offer a wide range of benefits for leaders, both in their current roles and for their long-term career development:

- Enhanced self, team, and organizational leadership skills
- More advanced understanding of the utility landscape
- Ability to deal with changes both internal to the utility and those imposed by external pressures from a rapidly changing sector
- Increased strategic leadership abilities
- Improved community and stakeholder engagement

Municipal utilities are more than just service providers. They are integral to the fabric of the communities they serve. DUEL is designed to be an essential program to ensure community-owned utilities have the leadership they need to navigate an increasingly complex future.

For those committed to shaping the future of municipal utilities and public service, DUEL offers an opportunity to grow as leaders, learn from industry experts, and to build the skills needed to thrive in an evolving sector.

MMUA will offer DUEL three times in 2025, with the first cohort kicking off in early April. Visit MMUA's website for more details and registration information. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at sdau@mmua.org or Karleen Kos at kkos@mmua.org.

State Legislative Priorities

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generating customers can receive and (b) reduce the total size of generating facilities eligible for net-metering from 40 to 20 kilowatts. The bill would also require that the facilities be sized to no greater than 105 percent of the customer's load.

Issue: Communities served by municipal utilities face massive remediation challenges related to PFAS.

Ask: Treat municipal utilities as a conduit of, and not the source of, PFAS chemicals and their ongoing spread. Any proposed new study or treatment mandate needs to identify adequate funding sources such that no utility should be forced to unduly raise their rates due to PFAS-related issues.

Issue: Minnesota's utilities need a bonding bill. The lack of a bonding bill in 2024, a traditional bonding year, forces local governments to either figure out alternative financing options, which may include tax increases, or delay work and face increased costs when the project is next discussed.

Ask: Support a bonding bill that adequately funds programs and projects, allowing municipal utilities to make needed improvements, repairs, and upgrades.

Issue: Minnesota's Earned Sick and Safe Time law lacks clarity and does not address certain questions relevant to effective implementation of the law.

Ask: Clarify and modify Earned Sick and Safe Leave mandates to address staffing issues experienced by employers including municipal utilities.

Issue: Legislation passed in 2024 exempting sales to cryptocurrency related data-mining operations from a utility's gross annual sales once sales make up

at least 40 percent of the utility's total sales requires further clarification for successful implementation.

Ask: Clarify the 2024 legislation so that it is clear the exemption of such sales is permanent once reached and, for utilities submitting three-year plans, the exemption begins in the year the threshold is first met.

Issue: Current law, Minnesota Statute §216B.164, gives customers the right to request excess generation payments be made via a credit on their next bill. This implies that without a request, payment would need to be made by check.

Ask: Clarify that utilities have the option of paying excess generation compensation by bill credit instead of issuing a check.

Issue: Modify Cold Weather Rule notice requirements can sometimes create an administrative burden on utilities and compromise efficiency for ratepayers.

Ask: Allow a utility to provide notices in electronic format when using automated billing systems.

Issue: An increasingly popular means of providing EV charging stations is for a third party to contract with a store or other commercial entity to offer customers a place to charge their EV while doing business with the entity. There is usually a fee imposed on the consumer by the third party. So long as the power to the charging station comes from the utility with exclusive service territory rights over the location of the charging station, charging a fee to use a charging station is allowed and should not be considered a third-party sale of electricity.

Ask: Clarify that it is acceptable for third parties to charge

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State Legislative Priorities

Continued from page 6

customers for the use of a charging station so long as the power to the charging station comes from the utility within whose service territory said charging station is located in Minnesota.

Issue: A law passed in 2024 mandated safety training for those workers involved in telecommunications installation. The language in the law may have the unintended consequence of requiring duplicate training for some utility employees.

Ask: Exempt utility workers already trained in directional boring from the new mandate for telecommunication line installers.

Issue: Federal and state requirements for replacement of lead and copper service lines lack clarity and may place a significant financial burden on utilities.

Ask: Track issues related to lead and copper service line replacement mandates, including possible sources of funding and need for immunity from damages.

Utilities in the lobby

Continued from page 3

2. In August 2024, Xcel Energy agreed to a settlement in its 2024 gas rates case (Minnesota Public Utilities Commission Docket 23-413) that removed association dues of about \$301,000 from consideration for recovery. The PUC had received negative public comments regarding these expenses.

3. In December 2024, a watchdog organization known as The Energy and Policy Institute published a lengthy and well-researched report titled “Power Trip: How utilities use customer money to fund lobbying, corporate branding, and luxury lifestyle expenses.” The report describes numerous ways IOUs “routinely seek to charge their customers for lobbying, corporate brand advertising, perks for executives and employees, and engagement with Wall Street—expenses that do not benefit customers, and often work against their interests.” One of the two principal authors lives in Minnesota. While the report does not address



the practices of municipal utilities, it also does not use language that clearly differentiates between municipal utility practices and those of IOUs. The report calls for a ban on cost recovery for staff lobbyists and other limitations on costs that can be passed on to ratepayers.

As a result of these developments over the past year, I expect we will continue to hear talk and experience pressure for accountability regarding every dollar utilities spend that is passed onto ratepayers. That’s not a

problem for municipal utilities. We are already highly accountable, and there are rules to which we adhere—such as the local government pay equity law—that limit the sorts of abuses that can occur in an IOU environment.

The need is differentiation. I would venture to guess that 99.9 percent of municipal customers don’t understand the differences in structure, resources, and accountability between your utility and an IOU. Consequently, they also don’t understand why building association dues—i.e., lobbying costs—into their rates is in their best interest. So, we

need to communicate about that in a way they can understand.

- We know that many ratepayers do not realize their utility is owned by their community. We need to tell them that. Clearly and often.

- We know most ratepayers do not fully understand the advantages of the municipal ownership model, especially that their rates are not funding company profits, stockholder dividends, or employee largesse. They may not understand how local accountability translates to lower rates, better decisions and better service for them. We need to tell that story too.

As a result of the above knowledge gap, your ratepayers currently are unlikely to understand why paying association dues to MMUA, and MMUA’s lobbying on their behalf, is entirely different than the lobbying of IOUs. They need to know that, just like back in 1931, our lobbying is not for anybody’s personal benefit. MMUA is *their* voice—the municipal customer—in St. Paul. Through you, our members, we represent their interests. Not our own, and not anybody else’s. MMUA shows up in St. Paul to ensure the legislature is aware of municipal utilities’ unique needs and concerns. We also try to influence lawmakers so they avoid actions that will harm local ratepayers.

Education and understanding must start in YOUR lobby. Make sure you are communicating the ways in which local ratepayer interests are represented in St. Paul by your hometown utility. It doesn’t have to be a flashing neon sign—well, LED sign—but I suggest you take intentional actions to communicate about the municipal model, and how your utility’s leaders are engaged with lawmakers, both locally and through MMUA in St. Paul. Tell them it’s part of how you make sure their rates stay low, and the lights and heat come on. Differentiate between your utility and an IOU. Make it something you do so routinely that it sticks in their heads like the old Reddy Kilowatt jingle.

I don’t know a single municipal utility leader—or municipal utility lobbyist for that matter—whose name will ever be top of mind years down the road. That’s not how any of us roll. Even so, we all want to feel that our lives have been spent on something meaningful and important. Working together, we can do that. Working together, we can be part of an invisible pantheon of utility professionals that preserves the municipal model for generations to come. Let’s get comfortable in the lobby. Let’s do it.



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Dubuque, Iowa wastewater treatment plant impacted by gas leak, explosion

On the afternoon of December 4, a gas leak at Dubuque's Water & Resource Recovery Center caused a room on the ground floor of the sludge processing building to fill with gas.

Some time later, the gas was ignited, causing an explosion.

First responders arrived on the scene, and the gas was turned off by the Dubuque Fire Department. There was interior damage to the Center, but sanitary sewer systems were not affected by the blast. No one was hurt by the explosion, and the incident is under investigation by local officials.



Department of Commerce sets preliminary anti-dumping tariffs on southeast Asian solar cells



On November 29, the US Department of Commerce announced its set of preliminary tariffs for solar cell imports from Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The tariffs were designed to prevent "dumping" of solar cells, which occurs when a country is selling the product for less than the cost of production in order to harm American solar manufacturers and/or aid foreign manufacturers.

The preliminary tariffs were set at rates anywhere from 21 percent to 271 percent, depending on the location and company manufacturing the cells.

The anti-dumping case was started in April by American solar trade group American Alliance for Solar Manufacturing Trade Committee. Finalization of the tariffs is expected by June 2, 2025.



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San Jose apartments to be heated by waste heat from data centers


Some 4,000 new apartments in downtown San Jose, California, will soon become the first project in the US to use waste heat from data centers to heat water and buildings.



The system is helpful for all parties involved. Utility systems and their ratepayers will have another energy source to tap while realizing carbon reductions and financial savings. Meanwhile, the use of waste heat for practical purposes allows data centers to avoid

construction of costly cooling towers.

The entire development project comprising both data centers and apartments is expected to be completed by 2031.



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FCC data shows expansion of broadband access in US



New data released by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) shows a rapid rate of broadband expansion in the US over the past few years.

The total number of locations served by 100/20 megabits per second (Mbps) broadband increased by 2.6 million between June 2023 and June 2024, with the number of cable broadband

locations increasing by 1.1 million. Just in rural America, a total of 2.1 million locations were added.

Much of the progress has come from federal programs, such as the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program, which have sought to expand broadband access to all Americans. Provider efforts have also played a role in the rapid buildout of service.

Coal ash could be a plentiful source of rare earth elements

Research led by the University of Texas at Austin has found that coal ash could be a significant source of rare earth elements (REEs)—a key component of modern electronics.

The study found that more than 11 million tons of REEs could be extracted from accessible coal ash in the US, a significantly larger figure than the estimated 3.6 million tons of REEs that would be available from traditional sources in the

US. The value of the resource is likely more than \$8 billion at current REE prices.

The research found that coal ash contains differing amounts of REE based on where the coal came from. Coal from the Powder River Basin in southeast Montana has low levels of REEs, but about 70 percent can be extracted. Conversely, Appalachian coal ash has high levels of REEs, but only about 30 percent can be extracted.

The extraction process uses

strong acids and bases, which can be expensive. However, researchers are hopeful that the end product's value will help pay for the extraction process, especially if it is streamlined through methods to be developed through additional experiments. With so much value present in REEs, the larger hope is that these valuable minerals can help pay for the remediation of the coal ash from which they are sourced.



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Technical & Operations Conference



The MMUA Board of Directors met before the conference.



Rod Courtney taught attendees about the growth of the safety culture through history and suggested that once again, it is time for a paradigm change to truly improve safety results.



Roger Avelsgard, Apprenticeship and Job Training and Safety Instructor for MMUA, congratulated some 20 Northwest Lineman College graduates.



Northwest Lineman College graduates posed for a group photo to celebrate their achievements.



Attendees enjoyed good food and great networking at the welcome reception.



Bennett Regulator Guards staff enjoyed the new vendor option of being “in the room where it happens” throughout most of the conference.



On day two, Kit Welchlin taught the group about the importance of great customer service, and how the little things can sometimes make a big difference.



Attendees shared camaraderie at the plated luncheon.

Technical & Operations Conference



Jay Reading of MMUA leads a roundtable on American Public Power Association grounding rules as Mike Willetts looks on.



Randy Peterson from Wyo-Ben presented on products for directional boring.



Shelly Dau of MMUA explored HR topics during the learning tracks.



Jon Spencer from Utility Solutions used computerized boards to teach about equipotential grounding.



The guys check out one of the many booths at this year's trade show.



Pete Fojtik from MP Technologies enjoyed the trade show.



Lee Shelby gave a powerful closing keynote about not taking safety, or our ability to do the small things, for granted.



Lee's presentation gave all attendees something to think about as the conference concluded.

T&O attendees learn and have fun at annual conference

Municipal utility workers, vendors, speakers, and subject-matter experts from across the US met in St. Cloud from December 10–12 for the annual Technical and Operations (T&O) Conference.

The theme of this year's event was "Safer Together," and it was delivered in a variety of ways throughout the conference.

The event started with a meeting of the MMUA Board of Directors, which approved two new strategic initiatives for MMUA including a new scholarship program and leadership development education program to be known as DUEL™. (You can read more about these new initiatives elsewhere in this issue of *The Resource*.)

The conference's opening keynote was given by Rod Courtney, a utility and safety expert, who discussed the eight habits of a highly effective safety culture. Rod took attendees through the history of workplace safety until the introduction of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in 1970. Rod noted that even though safety has made strides, occupational fatalities are still high. He argued that looking at safety through the lens of mathematically reducing unsafe incidents to reduce lost time accidents, serious and disabling injuries, and death, misses the boat. Instead, Courtney calls for a paradigm shift wherein safety is treated as a value. Priorities,

he argues, can be forgotten or superseded, whereas a value is lived as second nature. His eight habits are a suggested approach for making the paradigm shift in organizations.

On opening day, conferencegoers enjoyed a welcome reception and congratulated a new class of lineworkers. Brandon Wylie from Northwest Lineman's College and Jeremy Parker from the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry gave remarks and welcomed the graduates to the industry.

On day two, attendees heard from speaker and trainer Kit Welchlin, whose funny presentation shared ideas for demonstrating that customers truly are some of the most important people. As Kit said, "My friends and my neighbors didn't help me buy a house and put my kids through college; that was my customers." Kit emphasized the difference between a high quality/high service provider and a low-cost provider. Municipal utilities offer the best of both worlds, so sharing that with our customers can truly make a difference.

Roundtables on a dozen topics gave attendees a chance to discuss issues of specific interest. Subjects explored included the new 2025 gas school, new APPA grounding rules, and leading through change. Later in the day, conferencegoers chose workshops in tracks targeting field professionals and leadership professionals. One of many



highlights was Tony Oxborough, Jason Sykora, and Andy Johnson's talk on the 2024 floods and what they learned. Their efforts to protect their towns and city infrastructure truly reflected the best of Minnesota's hometown utilities.


Evening brought the trade show, which had a near-record number of vendors and attendees. People enjoyed talking to suppliers and exploring the latest

technologies and services available to utilities.

Day three brought a closing keynote by Lee Shelby, who had an electrical accident in 1991, and survived. Lee was working on a pole when 13,000 volts entered his body through his bolt cutters. Lee's mistakes and different safety requirements at the time ended up leading to the amputation of his forearms and hands. Lee talked about

how amazing the human hand is, and how we cannot take anything for granted.

This year's T&O was a great mix of learning, fun, and camaraderie with some of the best from Minnesota's municipal utilities. As always, it was wonderful to see so many members there, and we look forward to seeing you next year for another great program.



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Southwest US utilities start to join new energy market

Four major Arizona utilities announced on November 25 that they would be joining the Southwest Power Pool's (SPP) Markets+, a new day-ahead and real-time energy market that is expected to serve much of the western United States.

The utilities, which include Arizona Public Service, Salt River Project, Tucson Electric Power, and UniSource Energy Services, plan to join Markets+ because it will offer better reliability, cost savings, and more clean energy to the region. Mar-



kets+ is also designed to provide independent governance to all of its participants so all consortium members can be heard.

Markets+ is expected to launch in 2027.

DOE announces \$4.9 billion conditional loan guarantee for Midwest transmission line

On November 25, the Loan Projects Office of the United States Department of Energy (DOE) announced its office would fund a \$4.9 billion conditional loan guarantee to Grain Belt Express LLC, which is building Grain Belt Express Phase 1, a high-voltage interregional transmission line.

Grain Belt Express Phase 1 will stretch from southwestern Kansas to east central Missouri, a distance of 578 miles. The 2,500-megawatt line will help connect Kansas solar and wind resources to eastern customers and help connect three regional grids, the Southwest Power Pool, Midcontinent Independent System Operator, and Associated Electric Cooperative Incorporated. A second phase of the line would run from Missouri to



southwestern Indiana, where it would link into the PJM Interconnection.

The loan guarantees are contingent on environmental reviews and other conditions. Grain Belt Express Phase 1 will

also participate in FAST-41, which creates a new governance structure and set of procedures to improve federal environmental review and authorization procedures for covered infrastructure projects.

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Pacific Gas & Electric attempts to keep San Jose from going down the municipal electric utility path

Technology city San Jose, California, has been considering the formation of its own municipal electric utility for a few years.

Now, the city's incumbent power provider, Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), is trying to message itself out of being replaced by municipal utility.

At a recent meeting of San Jose's Transportation and Environment Committee, a PG&E vice president said the company was willing to work with the city to provide the reliable power and loads a growing business community needs. The executive noted that San Jose city officials had shared their concerns about PG&E's ability to meet those needs.

Because of the possibility of a new municipal utility, PG&E has said it will improve its local



grid, particularly in parts of the city that are seeing strong business growth. Whether PG&E's

overtures are enough to slow San Jose's march toward public power is yet to be seen.

Australian Energy Market Operator calls for ability to switch off nation's burgeoning solar output in emergencies

On December 2, the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), which manages Australia's national electricity market and wholesale electricity market, requested emergency powers to control solar output in every state of Australia in the case of an emergency.

The increase of rooftop solar in Australia has caused AEMO to request these powers so high levels of solar output do not damage the grid or cause security concerns. AEMO estimates that at certain times in the near future, 90 percent of grid demand could be met by rooftop solar, creating the opportunity for overloading

the grid and driving other forms of power production off the system.

Along with the ability to shut down or throttle solar output, AEMO also recommended a comprehensive strategy to increase power demand in the middle of the day when solar is flooding the grid.



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Torrefaction may help the world pivot away from coal

The developed world has made considerable progress in the past decade in shifting away from coal as a power generation source.

However, in fast-growing, developing parts of the world, coal still accounts for a high percentage of the fuel used for local power generation. However, a process called torrefaction might help change things.

Torrefaction is a thermal process that turns organic matter into a renewable energy source. Of particular interest is a method being developed

by a company called NextFuel, which is based in Stockholm, Sweden. NextFuel has found a process that can turn common organic matter like sugarcane leaves and grasses into coal-like briquettes that can be used directly in coal-burning processes. The briquettes burn cleanly, and most importantly, provide almost as much energy content as coal.

NextFuel is now looking at liquefying its product so it can be used as a liquid fuel in applications such as jet airplanes. Of particular note is the product can be created from organic

matter that is usually disposed of as waste around the world. In the US, materials like grasses, straw, and corn husks could be gathered and turned into NextFuel's briquettes in the same region where coal is currently being burned.

Not having to build new power plants to replace existing coal plants would also lead to additional carbon and cost savings for the energy sector. Biofuels created through torrefaction could make an excellent, local solution to the lingering problem of high-carbon power generation.



Supreme Court reviewing broadband subsidy program

On November 22, the Supreme Court agreed to hear two cases, consolidated for oral arguments, that might have a large impact on the universal service fund (USF), which provides subsidized broadband and telephone service to millions of Americans.

The Supreme Court's move is an outgrowth of the end of the Chevron deference, which let government decision-makers and experts set the specifics of agency policies. The case will look at whether the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) improperly set contribu-

tion rates to the USF without the input of Congress. They will also examine whether the Universal Service Administrative Company, a nonprofit that administers USF, was the right mechanism for doing so.

The case came to the Supreme Court after the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the current USF setup was unconstitutional. Industry and labor in the telecom industry are generally in favor of a continuation of the USF as established and were in favor of the Supreme Court hearing the case.

St. Louis, Missouri Sewer District to receive biggest loan in the history of Missouri clean water fund

On November 25, the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District received notification from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources that the district would receive a \$640 million loan to upgrade its wastewater system.

The loan will help ratepayers in St. Louis save \$402 million in interest payments.

The work will include the replacement of two hearth incinerators with fluidized bed incinerators, new sludge dewatering processes, and new solids



processing buildings. The work will help modernize facilities as well as improve sewer district carbon emissions.


The projects are expected to be completed by December 2028.

Russian attack on Ukraine leaves one million households without power

A Russian attack on Thanksgiving left one million households without power in a heavy drone and missile attack that targeted multiple cities, including the capital, Kyiv.

The target of the attacks was the Ukrainian power grid. The attacks also left many areas without safe drinking water supplies. The state grid operator, Ukrenergo, announced emergency blackouts so the country's energy system would sustain less damage.

Ukrainian authorities said that this was the Russian's 11th major strike on the country's energy infrastructure since March of 2024.



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Minnesota completes lead service line inventory

On November 25, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) announced that Minnesota had completed its lead service line inventory.

The state saw a high rate of service line inventory completions by its towns and water districts, allowing for a good picture of Minnesota's lead service lines.

Out of about 1.5 million service lines, only about 90,000 are composed of lead. Minnesota's next goal will be to eliminate all lead service lines by 2033. Many of the state water utilities



are already well underway on this task.

Xcel Energy to begin use of artificial intelligence to provide early detection of wildfires in Texas

In late November, Xcel Energy announced the company would deploy a new artificial intelligence (AI) wildfire detection system across 11 counties in the Texas Panhandle.

The system will use cameras coupled with AI to detect wildfires before they become large and out of control.

Xcel was found responsible for the Smokehouse Creek Fire, which affected the Panhandle and Oklahoma in March of 2024.



The cause of the fire was downed power lines resulting from a broken utility pole. The fire burned

more than 1 million acres and was the largest wildfire in the history of the State of Texas.

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Ann Arbor, Michigan voters approve unique municipal sustainable energy utility

On election day, the people of Ann Arbor voted by a 79-21 percent margin to approve a sustainable energy utility (SEU) in their city.

This unique model creates a community utility that does not replace the local for-profit utility but operates alongside it.

The reason for this approach is inherent to the nature of SEUs themselves. An SEU's goal is to create a local power system based on renewable power and focused on conservation and efficiency. Since the current local utility frequently operates aging infrastructure that is non-renewable, it makes sense to simply outcompete the utility with an SEU. In addition, the SEU model forgoes costly fights with the incumbent utility for their service territory and infrastructure.

In Ann Arbor's case, 600 customers had already registered to join the utility around the time of election day. The new utility plans to recruit enough customers for an initial 20 megawatts of generation infrastructure, which will then be financed by the city. Ann Arbor is also looking at creating a district-level geothermal network to heat and cool buildings.

Another interesting thing about this model is that efficiency and savings are part of its roots. It encourages residents to conserve and helps them make changes that bring about less demand. If Ann Arbor can succeed, their accomplishment will likely spark more interest in this unique form of energy utility.

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Pakistan's solar capacity ramps up

Pakistan saw unparalleled growth in its installed solar infrastructure in 2024.

During the period, the country added about 17 gigawatts of solar power, increasing the nation's electrical capacity by one-third. The growth places Pakistan on a par with developed countries that are embracing solar, since Pakistan is now the world's sixth-largest solar market.

The reason for the growth is twofold: expensive and unreliable domestic electricity heightens demand for alternative sources,

and cheap solar panels flooding the country from China make it possible for citizens to inexpensively harvest energy from the sun. These factors have allowed farmers and homeowners to switch away from the grid and embrace solar power.

A remaining challenge for the country is that millions of Pakistanis are still disconnected from the grid. If solar leads to fewer customers for established utilities and thus less investment in the current grid, things will not improve for those still living without electricity.



DOE agency considering funding opportunity on recovering high energy value materials from wastewater

In further evidence that wastewater treatment plants may someday become a rich source of profitable end products, the Department of Energy's Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E) is considering the issuance of a notice of funding opportunity—also known as a NOFO—to support the development of technologies that could remove high value materials from wastewater.



Some of the materials that ARPA-E is looking to recover include ammonia-based products, lithium, cobalt, and rare-earth elements. ARPA-E is seeking to

have final recovered products that include at least two high-energy value materials, have a greater than 90 percent recovery efficiency, and be commercially

viable in the US market.

Only further research will show how many valuable commodities can be extracted from humble wastewater.

EPA proposes new limits for nitrogen oxide emissions from power plants

On November 22, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released new proposed limits for nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions from most fossil-fuel combustion turbines.

The new limits are based on the application of combustion controls and selective catalytic reduction technologies to limit NOx emissions.

The proposed limits are estimated to reduce NOx emissions by 198 tons in 2027 and 2,659 tons in 2032. The present value of savings to society would be in the area of \$340 million.

EPA plans to tailor the rule for different sizes of combustion turbines and average load levels. The EPA will accept comments on the proposed rule for 90 days after publication in the *Federal Register*.

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Beckman Coulter, a provider of life diagnostics systems for the health care industry, plans to build a \$50 million building expansion in **Chaska**, bringing hundreds of new jobs and new electric demand to the city.



On December 10, AFSCME Local 66, **Duluth's** largest employee union, voted to authorize a strike in mid-January if necessary. The union includes utility employees.



On December 16, **Moorhead** moved forward with its \$500 million downtown redevelopment plan by purchasing the former Moorhead Center Mall for \$24.6 million. The city plans to demolish the mall and replace it with lots for new commercial and residential development.



New Ulm's waterline survey found 37 homes with lead lines, 274 homes with galvanized steel lines, and 329 homes with unknown connections. Waterlines for about 4,800 homes were inspected in New Ulm, according to Larry Pelzel of **New Ulm Public Utilities**.



On December 9, the **New Ulm** Economic Development Authority (EDA) confirmed that its solar panels had come online. A total of 260 solar panels were installed on the EDA's public housing properties, including 124 panels

on the Broadway Haus property and 136 panels on 10 rental houses. All public housing units in New Ulm now have active solar panel installations.



Riverside Trace Nursing Home in **Rochester** shared the goodwill of the holiday season by thanking **Rochester Public Utilities** for



its quick work on August 16 when a power outage affected their nursing home. RPU crews worked quickly to restore power at a time when residents were

getting ready for breakfast and staff were making lunch.



The City of St. Peter explained its LED lights rebate program on local radio in late November. The utility offers rebates of up to \$12 for each plug-in LED string or decoration of energy efficient holiday lighting resi-

dents purchase through the end of 2024.



Worthington Public Utilities installed a new lamp post in town on December 16 to replace a pole that was damaged by a car crash on December 12.

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The province of Ontario is planning to build three new electricity generation plants and is considering the use of nuclear power in its energy mix. The sites under consideration are locations already owned by Ontario Power Generation in Handimand County, St. Clair, and Port Hope, Ontario.



In late November, Houston-based oil company Phillips 66 was indicted by the US Department of Justice for violations of the Clean Water Act when the company dumped more than 300,000 gallons of wastewater from its Carson refinery into the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts sewer system. The wastewater included around 64,000 pounds of oil and grease.

On November 27, a vote by the Vancouver City Council kept in place a ban on natural gas for heating new homes.

On November 30, Vietnam's parliament approved a \$67 billion electric high-speed rail line from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City. The lawmakers also approved a new electricity law that will make investments in Vietnamese energy projects easier and approvals of direct power purchase agreements faster.

In early December, Saudi Arabia's National Water Company announced the country would implement \$3.2 billion in water and sanitation projects in the country. Saudi Arabia is undertaking the projects with the goal of bringing environmental and water sustainability to the country.

Oregon has approved its largest solar farm to date on 10,000 acres in the north-central part of the state. Sunstone Solar will have 4,000,000 solar panels when completed, enough to generate 1,200 megawatts of electricity.

According to the think tank Centre for Science and Environment, only about 28 percent of

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urban wastewater and sewage created in India undergoes treatment.

On December 13, The Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota reported that polio had been detected in wastewater in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Finland.



Reporting from *The Guardian* says that more than 1.5 million Germans now have balcony-located solar panels, making solar energy an increasingly large part of Germans' everyday lives.

According to an announcement from MIT spinoff Commonwealth Fusion Systems, Chesterfield County, Virginia will be the site for the world's first grid-scale fusion power plant. The plant is expected to come online in the early 2030s.

A United States Department of Energy report released on December 17 said that increased liquefied natural gas exports contribute to higher electricity and natural gas prices for US consumers.

On December 17, Juneau Utilities Division, which serves customers in Alaska's capital city, announced plans to raise residents' water and sewer rates by more than 50 percent over the next five years as the city tries to replace and repair much of its water and sewer infrastructure.



On December 18, over 150,000 power customers in Western Washington State were affected by outages caused by a weather system that brought 50–60 mile-per-hour winds to much of the region.

US power facilities have accumulated a 138-million-ton stockpile of coal supplies that is sitting unused. These supplies are expected to remain above 100 million tons through 2025, curtailing domestic demand for new coal production.

Georgia municipal water utility sues carpet and flooring manufacturers and chemical makers for decades of PFAS pollution

The City of Dalton in far north-west Georgia has long been proud of their flooring and carpet manufacturing industries.

However, the use of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the making of these products has tainted the city's water and wastewater, a cost the city will have to address.

To offset the costs of dealing with PFAS contamination, Dalton's municipal water utility is suing flooring manufacturers Shaw Industries and Aladdin Manufacturing, as well as chemical manufacturers 3M Co., Daikin America, and Chemours Co., who provided PFAS substances to flooring manufacturers for their products.

Dalton Utilities, starting in 1986, recycled treated wastewater by spraying it on farmland. Now, fears of contamination inside and outside city water facilities have opened Dalton Utilities to lawsuits.

The utility said it filed the December 10 suit to hold these companies accountable for their actions.



New cross-Oklahoma transmission line canceled

A planned transmission line that would have stretched across the State of Oklahoma from the panhandle through Tulsa and into central Arkansas was canceled by the United States Department of Energy on December 13 following criticism from local citizens and leaders.

The Delta-Plains National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor was to have been a 645-mile-long transmission

corridor that the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) believed would help increase interconnection between existing transmission infrastructure. However, farmers, ranchers, local citizens, and state legislators disagreed with the need for the line and its take-over of personal property under eminent domain laws.

Oklahoma's Governor, Kevin Stitt, was among those who did not want to see the project move forward.

Biogas investment tax credits included in final IRS rules

On December 4, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) released its final rules on energy investment tax credits, which included tax credits that are lucrative for developers of biogas from landfills.

The original rules were not as helpful to parties that turn biogas into renewable natural

gas, but pressure from industry groups caused the IRS to change its perspective.

The new rules will provide biogas companies with greater clarity around their ability to access tax credits. The IRS's new rules also offer increased clarity around offshore wind, heat pumps, and hydrogen storage projects.

Upcoming events

Emergency Preparedness and Restoration Conference

February 19–20
Holiday Inn, St. Cloud

Join other municipal professionals at this interactive conference. Attending will enhance your utility's eligibility for participation in future mutual aid events.

We recommend participating in this critical conference to familiarize yourself with the inner workings of the mutual aid and support processes.

Whether traveling with crews across state lines or in-state to provide mutual aid or making a call for help, you need to understand the details of how mutual aid works.

This year's conference will be a very special event. Amy Zubaly, Florida Municipal Electric Association's executive director, will discuss the complex strategies involved in coordinating support efforts for some of the country's largest municipal utilities. We will also facilitate a thorough review of our mutual aid efforts related to Hurricane Milton.

To register, visit mmua.org/events/emergency-prep-conf-2025.

Substation School

March 11–13
Elk River

MMUA is pleased to partner with Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) on the 2025 Substation School. Having the best distribution system in the world won't matter if your substation isn't operating properly. Recognizing that, MMUA presents a Substation School annually. This school offers instruction on a variety of important topics that can benefit anyone working in/on your substation. In addition to expert-led classroom instruction, attendees will be able to tour a substation and a solar field with battery storage. Our Substation School is the best annual opportunity in Minnesota for learning about current trends and best practices for maintaining your utility's vital substations.

To register, visit mmua.org/events/substation-school.

Electrical Skill Training for Water/Wastewater Operators

March 19–20
MMUA Training Center

If you work in the water/wastewater department, you don't want to miss this once-a-year opportunity for training to further develop your skills and increase competency. Understanding what electrical work can and cannot be done by non-electrician personnel can present a challenge. Recognizing your limitations is the key to ensuring everyone's safety.

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- Safety overview: proper personal protective equipment, review of National Electrical Code, hazard identification, and arc flash hazards
- Basic and advanced hands-on activities: electrical testing and troubleshooting, lockout tagout, voltage checks, and testing and sizing fuses
- Communications
- Overview of electrical prints

In addition, participants will get a first-hand look at components while touring the Marshall Municipal Utilities Water Treatment Plant.

To register, visit mmua.org/events.

For more information, see the Events Calendar at www.mmua.org or call MMUA at 763-551-1230.