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Busy legislative session brings changes to utilities

By Kent Sulem

The 2023 legislative session ended early, but only by two hours and not the 10 days originally sought by leadership.

If you ask any lobbyist, you are likely to hear that this session was the fastest paced in recent memory; that is, until the final week when it became an all-too-common and frustrating game of hurry up and wait.

Conference committees and subcommittees negotiated final deals on the mandatory budget pieces as well as key policy provisions out of sight of most of us working in the capitol. The reliance on these non-public, closed-door negotiations makes it very difficult to know what will be in a bill, and in what form, until the conference report is released. This year, most conference reports were signed in private. Some conference committees held public meetings to walk through the conference report, but only after it had been signed and posted, so there was



Kent Sulem (far right) testifies at the legislature with Assistant Majority Leader Nick Frenz (center).

no opportunity to offer final comments or suggestions on the content.

In the end, over 6,700 bills were introduced between the House and Senate during the 2023 session. Just 75 of these

bills made it to the Governor's desk. Here is a summary of the new laws that will have the greatest impact on municipal utilities.

- Chapter 5 (SF 13): New state

holiday established. The law recognizes June 19 of each year as "Juneteenth." As a state holiday, no public business may be transacted unless necessary. Chapter 5 was signed into law February 3,

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EPA Releases Biden Administration CO2 Regulations

By Bill Black

On May 11, the public first got a look at the latest Environment Protection Agency (EPA) proposal to regulate carbon dioxide emissions from certain types of power plants that are currently running and certain types that will come online in the future.



On May 23, when the draft rules were published in the federal register, APPA held a webinar explaining them. The presenter, a nationally recognized leader in the field of environmental law, described the rules as unclear in certain ways even to lawyers. The expert also said the proposed language is subject to interpretation and almost certain to be challenged in court from multiple angles. However, much like the rules they would replace—the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan and the Trump administration's

Affordable Clean Energy rule—the new, unnamed Biden administration rules may drive industry planning regardless of whether, or to what degree, they survive legal challenges.

What most municipal utilities need to know as generators is that the rules, as proposed, affect existing coal-fired boiler units of any capacity and existing natural gas-fired simple or

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Marlis Knowlton, retiring Eyota City Clerk, observes the value of contracted services for smaller communities

Editor's note: Marlis Knowlton is retiring as City Clerk in Eyota after 22 years. MMUA spoke with Marlis about her experiences with the city, the power of cities working with MMUA and other contracted services, and the changes she's seen.

MMUA: You have been the City Clerk in Eyota for 22 years. How did you first hear about and become interested in the position? What did you do previously?

Marlis: I first was hired as a part-time accounting clerk doing payroll and accounts payable. I was looking for a part-time job that would become full time. I will admit at the time I was hesitant to work for the government of any kind. Then in 2005 I became the Clerk/Treasurer. Prior to working for the city, I worked in what I call the real world, doing a few different jobs that revolved around accounting

and office work.

MMUA: So, when did you join the Eyota team? What is your retirement date?

Marlis: I started April 2, 2002, and my last working day will be May 31, 2023. Never did I think I would be here this many years.

MMUA: A City Clerk wears a lot of hats. What are some of the main duties you fulfill in your role?

Marlis: That is probably one of the hardest questions to answer. In a little city, office staff needs to know—and do—every task. As the clerk I think the

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All-staff planning meeting

MMUA staff met in Plymouth on May 3 and engaged in some comprehensive planning.

As a team building/strategy exercise, small groups took the "Marshmallow Challenge;" they attempted to build the tallest

structure possible with only 21 sticks of spaghetti, a yard of tape, and a marshmallow (which had to be at the top.)



(L-R) Adam Chesney, Mike Grabow., Rita Kelly, and Bernie Richards work diligently to build the structure in less than 15 minutes.



(L-R) Joe Schmidt, Rusty Kaderabek, Keith Byklum, Dan Nath, and Bill Black's tower was one of two to be standing at the end. The shorter tower created by Rita Kelly's team not only survived the competition, it refused to fall down a week later!

Stepping into Leadership



Stepping into Leadership Group 2 graduated on May 11. Pictured are:

Front L-R: Lori Jerpbak, Owatonna; Brent Glende, Owatonna; Josh Prokopec, Owatonna; Joe Tietel, New Ulm; Tyler Tretter, East Grand Forks; Tony Hartle, Owatonna; Brandon Belch, Owatonna

Back L-R: Instructor Steve Wischmann; Susan Salisbury, Blue Earth, Ed Zurn, Willmar; Matt Kaderlik, Willmar; T.J. Kalis, Owatonna; Eric Henderson, Kasson; Craig Schmieg, Chaska; Chad Cumbee, Blue Earth; Tyler Hanson, Shakopee; Brianna Feil, East Grand Forks; Jonas Morehouse, Austin; Patrick Kukla, New Ulm; Mike Haffield, Two Harbors.;Darrel Ykema, Luverne; Instructor Dana Haagenson

On the road of physical safety

Cue Willie Nelson.

I have an earworm of his famous tune, “On the Road Again” as Mike Willetts and I spend the month traveling all over Minnesota. It’s time for our annual visits with MMUA member utilities and other safety services customers. These jaunts always give us a great opportunity to hear feedback on how we are doing and what is on everybody’s mind.

Among the topics that have been coming up this year, the issues of utility security and employee safety are themes we have heard. While nobody is “freaked out” (my nine-year-old granddaughter’s favorite turn of phrase), the subject is being taken seriously. Nobody has easy answers to offer.

Security threats to utility property are real. If your community is lucky enough to be untouched by threats to utility infrastructure, your situation is about as common as Memorial Day without rain. Consider this data:

- In February 2023, the U.S. Department of Energy reported that incidents of physical damage to bulk power system facilities rose by 77 percent in 2022.
- Of the 163 incidents of deliberate physical damage, 90 were listed as involving vandalism, 57 as “suspicious activity,” 15 as actual physical attacks, and one as sabotage.

While most of these events did not affect customers and resulted only in inconvenience for utility employees, that was not always the case. In the most severe situations, between 21,000 and 45,000 customers lost power—in one case, it took

nearly a week for service to be restored.

The ways in which these disruptions are occurring are particularly unsettling for utility leaders because there are few ways to prevent them. In particular, cyber attacks and the use of weapons to damage utility infrastructure pose threats where the attacker may be far away and unseen. The perpetrators can easily obtain the means of doing major damage, and they may have nothing specific against the local utility. In a twisted way, they just want to “achieve” something.

Worries about utility employee safety are growing. Attacks against utility employees are not new, but for a long time it seemed they happened mostly in big cities. In smaller towns we prided ourselves on being friendlier, and because “everybody knows everybody” we tended to know who the live wires were anyway. We thought we knew how to handle them.

Over the last few years that sense of security in Smalltown USA has changed. There are lots of hypotheses about why that is the case—increasing gun violence, drugs, changing values related to church or authority—but none of that really matters to MMUA’s members. Let the social scientists figure out the reasons. We need to worry about how to actually keep our employees safe, and how to make it possible for them to feel they are safe, which are both incredibly important.

Situational awareness. In virtually every profession there are inherent risks. The most common interpersonal safety situations faced by municipal

utility workers in Minnesota based on anecdotal sharing with our safety team, Mike, and me seem to be:

- Confrontations with customers or the public. Utility workers often interact with customers or members of the public who may be dissatisfied with high or confusing bills, shutoffs, or other customer service issues. Under the right circumstances, these interactions can escalate into verbal or physical confrontations, potentially leading to violence.
- Robberies and thefts. While we have not heard of anyone in Minnesota being “caught in the act,” utility workers often handle valuable equipment, tools, or materials that can be attractive targets for theft. Usually, the thief is gone by the time the worker gets to the scene. If a worker should ever be so unfortunate as to come face to face with someone attempting to steal utility assets, the “bad guys” may have no compunction about resorting to violence to achieve their objectives.
- Trespassing and unauthorized access. Utility workers often need to access private properties or restricted areas to perform their tasks. Unfortunately, they may encounter irate or armed property owners who feel threatened by the worker(s) on their land. They may also encounter individuals who are trespassing or attempting to gain unauthorized access to utility property. These situations can pose risks, as confrontations or altercations with trespassers can turn violent.

From My Desk to Yours

Karleen Kos
MMUA CEO



- Emotional reactions during emergencies. During crises such as natural disasters or major service disruptions, utility workers may face heightened emotions from affected individuals who are frustrated, anxious, or angry. These emotional reactions can sometimes escalate and lead to violent behavior directed at utility workers.

Searching for answers. Some of the threats that concern employees are real, and some are merely perceived. Of the real ones, some can be avoided, and some cannot. Of the perceived ones, all must be addressed. In the history of the world, telling someone, “Calm down; you are overreacting,” has resulted in exactly zero instances of anyone calming down and gaining perspective. When workers are afraid, employers have a legal and a moral obligation to address the sources of the fear.

There’s also the practical side. Frightened employees are not productive or happy. So, along with all of the other responsibilities that go with running a municipal utility, leaders are grappling to find steps that can reasonably be expected to protect the utility’s property and staff in a manner that ticks the



boxes of strategic management of assets, effective risk mitigation, and fostering a constructive workplace culture.

As Mike and I meet with groups all over Minnesota, we are hearing practical questions like, “How many shutoff? Is sending two people overreacting? We are a small town; we don’t have two people to send – what can MMUA do to help my staff keep themselves safe? How can the police or sheriff help?”

We are your partners in dealing with the hard stuff. Several years ago, the President of the United States was asked whether being President was as hard a job as it seems. His reply was along the lines of, “Everything that gets to the President’s desk is hard. The easy stuff gets solved elsewhere. If it makes it to the Oval Office, it’s because nobody has been able to fix it so far.”

MMUA, like the President, expects to deal with the hard problems. We don’t have any perfect answers to these questions, but we are willing to take the lead in helping Minnesota’s utilities find solutions that are right for our towns. We are also willing to help you implement them if we can.

To that end, we are taking the following steps:

- At the upcoming Summer Conference, we will be offering roundtable discussions on physical security for utility assets and on personal safety for utility employees. We will be prepared to share information on best practices as they currently exist. We will also come prepared to listen to what is really happening in your communities so that we can develop additional tools and training.
- At December’s Technical and Operations Conference, watch for sessions that provide a deeper dive into these two topics. Using insights gained from the conversations Mike and I are having in June and at the Summer Conference roundtables, we will bring in one or more speakers and build content that addresses these issues more thoroughly.

- Working with our colleagues at the League of Minnesota Cities, we look forward to

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Reliability data reflects Minnesota municipals' excellence in operations

Reliability is an important marker of quality power delivery for any utility: the ability to deliver reliable power with minimal interruptions, as well as minimal duration of interruption when interruptions occur, are vital to all ratepayers and a point of pride for utilities.

According to the numbers, Minnesota's municipal utilities are again leading the way for reliability in our state.

Reliability is measured with metrics called SAIDI, SAIFI, and CAIDI. SAIDI is short for "System Average Interruption Duration Index," and it measures the average outage duration for each customer served. SAIFI is the acronym for "System Average Interruption Frequency Index" and measures the average number of interruptions that a customer would experience. CAIDI stands for "Customer Average Interruption Duration Index" and represents the average outage duration that any given customer would experience. It can also be understood as referring to the average time for power to be restored.

The APPA 2021 EIA reliability data spreadsheet tool is a helpful way to compare and contrast reliability data. Ji Yoon Lee, Manager, Research & Development at the American Public Power Association, says, "The tool contains the EIA 861 reliability data, sorted, organized, and presented in tables for your convenience. It is based on the latest October 2022 EIA release of the Form 861 reliability data."

The tool is used by inputting a state into cell F25 and then reading the output. For Minnesota in 2021, 41 utilities submitted reliability data: 26 cooperatives, 3 investor-owned utilities (IOUs), and 12 public power utilities.

The power of locally controlled public utilities is immediately apparent in the data. The aggregate data of the twelve public power utilities submitting information sees their results on every metric showing more reliability than cooperatives and IOUs.

For example, the second row, "Average of SAIDI without MED" (meaning a major event day with long outages) sees cooperatives averaging 82.21 minutes of outage duration per customer served, IOUs averaging 94.68 minutes, and public power utilities averaging just 18.84 minutes! For "Average of SAIFI without MED," cooperatives have .89 interruptions, IOUs have 1.07, and public power utilities have just 0.26.

Some municipal utilities publish their SAIDI, SAIFI, and CAIDI data, which can be collected using the eReliability Tracker software. Alexandria Light and Power (ALP) is one Minnesota municipal utility

	2021			
	All	Coop	IOU	Public Power
Number of Utilities Submitting Data in This State:	41	26	3	12

Reliability Metrics (IEEE Standard)	All	Coop	IOU	Public Power
Average of SAIDI With MED (IEEE) (Minutes)	114.13	142.47	121.26	46.82
Average of SAIDI Without MED (IEEE) (Minutes)	70.27	82.21	94.68	18.84
Average of SAIFI With MED (IEEE) (Operations)	1.04	1.14	1.18	0.78
Average of SAIFI Without MED (IEEE) (Operations)	0.78	0.89	1.07	0.26
Average of CAIDI With MED (IEEE) (Minutes)	105.00	124.51	102.85	62.71
Average of CAIDI Without MED (IEEE) (Minutes)	88.10	93.01	87.35	72.28

Reliability Metrics (Other Standard)	All	Coop	IOU	Public Power
Average of SAIDI With MED (Other) (Minutes)	94.38	178.81	N/A	9.96
Average of SAIDI Without MED (Other) (Minutes)	155.43	155.43	N/A	N/A
Average of SAIFI With MED (Other) (Operations)	0.96	1.74	N/A	0.17
Average of SAIFI Without MED (Other) (Operations)	1.66	1.66	N/A	N/A
Average of CAIDI With MED (Other) (Minutes)	90.56	108.46	N/A	72.66
Average of CAIDI Without MED (Other) (Minutes)	90.51	90.51	N/A	N/A

doing just that. They have been able to pull out their 2022 data. (All figures exclude major event days.)

ALP experienced a SAIDI of 6.94 minutes in 2022, outpacing the regional average of

85.01 minutes and the national average of 140.45 minutes. Their CAIDI figure came in at 60.98 minutes, with the regional average being 91.77 minutes and the national average being 93.65 minutes. The SAIFI figure,

recorded by number of interruptions, had ALP coming in at .11, with the regional average being 0.41 and the national average being 1.21.

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Contracted Services for Smaller Communities

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most time-consuming would be supporting the council via the agendas and minutes, and so on. A lot of research goes into providing councils with enough information and facts for them to make decisions. Another task would be planning and zoning-type responsibilities.

MMUA: Brad Gunderson of the MMUA Safety Team is one of many faces and organizations that pass through your office who work with the city. What organizations or city partners do you see on a regular basis? What changes have you seen with the MMUA Safety Team or the services that they provide in your 22 years?

Marlis: As a small city we contract a lot of services. For instance, CEDA—Community and Economic Development Associates—provides an economic development authority director. That director provides experience, education, and contacts that I do not have, nor the time to develop. CMS—Construction Management Services—provides building plan review and inspections. David Drown Associates provide financial advisory support. WHKS, our current city engineers, are beyond helpful. All these experts give small-town clerks time to do all the other things, including the little things like [addressing] dog complaints.

MMUA changes include keeping up with the never-ending regulation changes, and yet one thing nice about MMUA is that they don't change. They are always there supporting us, teaching us, and being that little pest that keeps us thinking

about safety, which we all need to be reminded of.

MMUA: Eyota is an MMUA member with their municipal water utility. What changes have occurred with the city water utility during your tenure? What might be coming in the future?

Marlis: MMUA has helped so much, and a lot of it with just the mundane monthly training, to continue to make safety changes. Just lately the city purchased new safety gear for the public works crew [to wear], while climbing the water tower for inspections.

MMUA: What aspects of your job do you enjoy the most?

Marlis: I have enjoyed learning what really all goes on and is needed to keep a little city going on a daily basis. I doubt the majority of citizens really understand all that is involved. Sometimes it is hard not to respond negatively when a citizen gets lippy and makes jokes about one of the public works staff standing around, while we know it is nice to have someone standing by keeping an eye on the coworker in the sewer manhole. If they only knew.

MMUA: What is a notable event or happening that you remember during your time with the city?

Marlis: I guess it is human nature to remember the bad things. The 2007 heavy rain event! Hope to never deal with that again. And no matter how much things change; it is still the same. Another neighbor complaint, just different neighbors. Or a new subdivision but still the



Eyota's City Hall on Front Street, the "face" Marlis wanted readers to see.

same process. As I look back now, I am amazed how much Eyota has grown in the past 22 years.

MMUA: As you move toward retirement, what has the transition been like? How are workforce issues affecting your part of Minnesota?

Marlis: We haven't transitioned much yet. Been too busy trying to hire someone and keeping up with day-to-day stuff. Workforce [needs] currently are disturbing. Disappointed in the small number of applicants received for our three Eyota positions. And you hear it over and over again, no matter what business. Everybody is hiring.

MMUA: What activities or hobbies will you get to enjoy more when you retire?

Marlis: I'm still making a list.

Looking forward to weeding the garden in the morning when it is cooler. I'm hoping to do more creative projects; that will be a nice change from regulations and rules.

MMUA: What is life like in Eyota? What do you like about it?

Marlis: Eyota is considered a bedroom community to Rochester. So, a lot of residents take off in the morning and leave town to go to work. But when we are all home, it is a nice small town with kids playing in the park and neighbors conversing. Eyota is my hometown, even though I live a mile out of town. Part of the reason I have worked for the city of Eyota is because it is my hometown. I can't picture myself doing this for another town. But that's just me.

MMUA: Is there anything else you

would like to add?

Marlis: MMUA is an amazing support tool for the city. Monthly training can be bothersome because there are other things to do that seem more important. But having them here makes us stop and think. MMUA obviously specializes more in electrical type training and something came up just recently in training about hard hats. Electrical workers supposedly check their hard hats regularly to see if they need replacing because they become brittle. Our public works guys looked at each other and went "wow." I think we have had the same hard hats in the shop for decades. We have new hard hats ordered. Who knew? MMUA did! And now we do too.

MMUA wishes Marlis a happy retirement!



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On the Road

Continued from page 3

adding an on-demand course on personal safety and de-escalation techniques within the next year.

- If indicated, we will also develop additional resources to guide you in assessing and improving the physical safety of your utility's assets.

In other words, we are going to do what we can to help you do what you can. Like everything else in the world of municipal utilities, we will get through it together.

I started this column invoking the words of Willie Nelson's "On the Road Again." Let's end it with a couple of other Willie quotes—these from his autobiography *It's a Long Story: My Life*—that are appropriate in this situation. "When it's on us, seems like the storm will never pass. But it always does," and "Positive thoughts lead to positive actions."

Roger Warehime joins MMUA board



Roger Warehime is an accomplished professional joining the Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association (MMUA) as a new board member.

With extensive experience in the utility industry and a strong commitment to community development, Roger brings valuable knowledge and expertise to his role.

Roger serves as the general manager at Owatonna Public Utilities where he has been employed since 2004, playing a key role in the organization's success and growth. He holds a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Minnesota and an MBA from St. Thomas University, providing him with a solid technical foundation and business acumen.

Prior to his work in the utility industry, Roger gained experience in manufacturing and renewable energy, which broadened his perspective and equipped him with a diverse skill set. This background enables him to offer unique insights to the MMUA and effectively navigate the challenges and opportunities facing municipal utilities.

Roger's board experience includes serving on esteemed boards such as the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA), Minnesota Municipal Gas Agency (MMGA), Owatonna Business Development Center, Foremost Brewing Cooperative, and the Owatonna Park Board. Additionally, he has chaired MMUA's Government Relations Advisory Group for the past two years, showcasing his dedication to shaping favorable policies for municipal utilities and their customers.

Beyond his professional achievements, Roger values his 29-year marriage with his wife, Kristin, and takes pride in the accomplishments of their adult children, Jacob and Jackie. Jacob works as a writer for an architectural firm in Denver, while Jackie lives in New York City and excels as a product designer for a consulting company serving the medical industry.

Roger's commitment extends to community leadership, where he has made significant contributions. He actively participates in the Owatonna Partners for Economic Development, leveraging his expertise to foster sustainable growth. He has also facilitated

community listening sessions for the Owatonna Forward initiative, which aimed to align community interests around common projects.

Notably, Roger led the effort to establish Minnesota's first cooperatively owned brewpub, showcasing his entrepreneurial spirit and dedication to supporting local businesses. Furthermore, he has facilitated strategic planning sessions for several nonprofit organizations, including the United Way of Steele County, Rachel's Light, SteeleCo Works, The Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, and the Owatonna Area Business Development Center. These involvements underscore Roger's commitment to collaborate and community empowerment.

With Roger Warehime as a new board member, MMUA can leverage his strategic insights, industry expertise, and community-focused mindset. His leadership and dedication to public service will undoubtedly contribute to the association's mission of advancing municipal utilities and serving the needs of communities throughout Minnesota.

Nominations sought for MMUA awards, board of directors seat

MMUA's Nominations and Awards Committee is accepting nominations for MMUA's 2023 industry awards.

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

Nomination forms for the various awards can be downloaded from our website <https://www.mmua.org/about/awards-and-recognition>. All nominations will be considered. The deadline for 2023 submissions is June 30. The awards will be presented at the MMUA Summer Conference on August 22.

Submit for One or More of the Following Award Categories

System Innovation—This award is given to a utility that has demonstrated leadership and innovation in customer service, energy efficiency or renewables, technology, or other areas.

Public Service—This award is given to a state or federal elected or

appointed official who has been a strong supporter of MMUA and its members.

Distinguished Service—This award is given to individuals who perform outstanding service in support of the association and its goals.

Community Service—This award is given to an individual who has performed long and well in support of a municipal utility at the local level.

Rising Star—This 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.

Board of Directors

Serving on MMUA's Board of Directors is an honor, as well

as a responsibility and a great opportunity for professional growth. One seat on the Board is coming open this year through the regular rotation process. 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 MMUA CEO 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 (3131 Fernbrook Lane North, Suite 200, Plymouth, MN 55447). The deadline for nominations is June 30.

If you have any questions about the nominations process or what service on the board involves, please contact 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.



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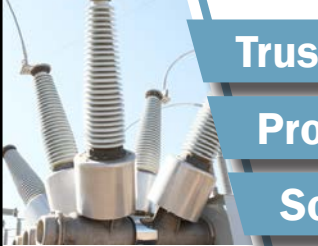
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MMUA instructs on infectious disease at Navajo Nation



The entrance to the Navajo Nation.

MMUA Safety Team members Joe Schmidt and Mike Grabow recently returned from a grant-funded journey to educate the utility personnel of the Navajo Nation about infectious diseases. Navajo Nation is a Native American reservation that covers over 17 million acres in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, and has over 173,000 tribal members as of 2010. MMUA talked with Joe and Mike to learn more about this interesting experience.

MMUA: When did you go to Navajo Nation? What was the travel like?

Joe Schmidt: The first time I went out there was Sunday, March 26, and I returned on Saturday, April 1. Anthony Lenz and I presented three training courses per day, Monday through Friday. The second trip was with Mike Grabow, and we were out there from Sunday, April 16 to Saturday, April 22. We also presented three training courses per weekday, and each session was about two to two and a half hours long.

On the first trip we flew into Phoenix and then drove to Window Rock, the capital of the Navajo Nation. It is located about four and a half hours from the airport. From there we drove to the Navajo Tribal Utility headquarters in Fort Defiance.

The second trip, we flew into Phoenix, and we drove up to Farmington, New Mexico, which is about a six-hour drive. We stayed in Farmington and drove every day to Ship Rock, which is their district office, where we presented.

MMUA: Tell me a little bit about the grant that facilitated this work and about the presentations you gave.

Joe: The grant is called the Susan Harwood Training Grant. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has funds available through that program, and APPA applied for a grant to provide infectious disease training for the Navajo Nation. MMUA then competed for, and won the opportunity, to be APPA's subgrantee responsible for actually developing and delivering the training program.

We didn't know this, but the family structure and culture of how the Navajo people live was an important consideration with COVID. Unfortunately, the health service that was

provided to them during COVID wasn't what they expected it to be. Health care all over the world was very limited because of a lack of knowledge of what COVID was. The case fatality rate, the number of people who passed away, was double for the Navajo Nation compared to other parts of the United States. That was very concerning. That fatality rate, combined with the limitations on the available health care, meant that communities surrounding the tribal nation wouldn't let people from the Navajo Nation into their communities during the pandemic. They literally put up roadblocks so that people couldn't come in unless their address was in that community. That was shocking to me.

We found this out when we were in Window Rock, where commercial services weren't as prolific as in another town 20 miles away called Gallup. That's where the stores and restaurants were. When we were talking to folks, they said we weren't allowed into Gallup. We can make an assumption that because there were higher cases in Window Rock, they didn't want that in Gallup.

MMUA: At the Navajo Nation, you were doing infectious disease training. Tell us about that.

Joe: We researched to learn about infectious diseases in general and about infectious diseases that particularly affect the Navajo Nation. We selected eight illnesses that had some significance to the Navajo people. We then presented our findings to APPA, the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, and OSHA to get their approval on what would be presented during the course. In the end we included COVID and Hantavirus. Hantavirus had a huge outbreak in the Navajo Nation a few years ago. The two illnesses have some similarities in their signs and symptoms. We were approved to present on those and several others, and we also provided some general information about infectious diseases. This all wound up in a PowerPoint deck with a narrative for us instructors.

Karleen [Kos] had a big hand in ensuring the PowerPoint met acceptable standards, and she also hunted down a lot of statistics that are specific to the Navajo people. OSHA felt that was important to making

the material relevant to the audience. Anthony and I created the narrative presentations. We included some lectures, hands-on presentations, and some personal stories. Every day, we taught three groups. The first one went from 8:30 to 11 a.m., the second group ran from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., and the final group was from 2:30 to 5 p.m. That was our day, and we did 15 presentations in a week.

MMUA: What were some of the other infectious diseases you educated the tribe on?

Joe: Hantavirus, COVID, Hepatitis, HPV, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, HIV, and Monkeypox. There was a lot there. OSHA also has some requirements in what we presented, such as talking about the general duty clause and the Whistleblower Act, so those parts and pieces are also covered.

Mike Grabow: My portion of the course was talking about how infectious diseases interact with your body, what their incubation length is, and so on. I covered how flu is different than COVID. Joe then talked about specific diseases and specific signs and symptoms. I told stories about how it affected me when I had COVID, how it affected the economy, and how illnesses can affect us socially. I also talked about how my cousin got Lyme Disease. She got bitten by a tick, and it has changed her life forever. She has Down Syndrome, and it took a long time to diagnose her condition because of the communication barrier. Normally, you'd say how you were feeling, but she couldn't. We talked about how she survived the disease.

The course covered listening to your body and being aware of the signs and symptoms that something is wrong. It's all about listening to the little voice in your head and getting help if you aren't feeling right.

MMUA: Which areas seemed to be of greatest interest to the attendees?

Joe: There didn't seem to be any one that made them perk up their ears in particular. They were very engaged in what we were presenting for all of them. We said, "Take this information home and use what you can within your own family and community. This material was created for general knowledge so that you can have conversations with each other. That way you can protect yourself from all of the infectious diseases."

We did a demonstration of the importance of infection control and personal hygiene, showing how you can transmit infectious diseases by not washing and not disinfecting your hands.

Some other things we covered included a demonstration on preventing tick bites and what to do when they occur. We talked

about streptococcus. Because of the close living arrangements for most Navajo people, they are at 10 times higher risk for the spread of strep group A. We also talked about tuberculosis. They were very interested in our personal stories, and how we related what we know or do to infectious diseases. That angle seemed to score high on the evaluations—the personal stories.

Overall, the course was very well received. I don't remember seeing any negative evaluations. People were very engaged and appreciated it. I look forward to getting together with them again and finishing up the third part of this engagement.

MMUA: Who were you presenting to?

Joe: Navajo Tribal Utility Authority employees. They have over 900 workers, and our goal was to present to 750 of them. As of today, we have trained 651 staff. So, we still have at least 99 to train before the September 29 deadline.

The Navajo reservation is 27,000 square miles, about the size of West Virginia, so it takes time to reach everyone.

MMUA: As you were teaching, were you also learning? What did you learn from the Navajo or their home?

Joe: They are a very patriotic

Continued on page 9

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Navajo Nation

Continued from page 8

and proud culture. It's very rewarding to see how they love their community, their country, and their culture. It is very intertwined. The loyalty is kind of a shock based on what we know about how Native Americans have been treated over the years. Many of the people who live on the reservation left for a period of time, served in the military, and then came back after their service. We learned that they are hard-working folks, and the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority is very all-encompassing. They have gas, water, wastewater, fiber optic, electricity, and cell phone service. It is a huge utility provider on many more fronts than I thought. Safety is a big part of their culture. They preach it, live it, and want more of it.

Mike: They're utility workers, so people I'm used to working with and being around. They were linemen, water workers, wastewater workers, and electricians. They are a proud people. When you got done, some people would come up and talk to you afterwards. Some wouldn't want to talk about something in front of the whole group. They would just wait in line to come and shake your hand. One of the employees wrote down our names and our wives' names too, so they could tell their families that these

people took time out of their lives to come and help us.

I realized down there that even though we might not be rich in Minnesota, we are really lucky to live where we live. The Navajo deal with a lot of poverty at a level that makes life hard.

Utility workers, we are all the same. With my background as a lineman, electrical workers would kind of gravitate toward me. We'd sit and talk after, and they made me feel like one of the guys. I really enjoyed that, and I was thankful that people made me feel so good about coming down.

MMUA: They had a lot of stories to share and you did too. I'm sure that really helps the learning process.

Mike: We talked about the economy, how there were shortages of things like toilet paper (during the pandemic). In my presentation, I talked about "What do you do if you're really in trouble?" "I call my mom!"

MMUA: I bet that got a good laugh.

Mike: Yep, when people can relate to you and your experiences, that helps make a real connection. When they've had the same situations happen to them.

MMUA: MMUA is going back to Navajo Nation. Where is the

MMUA team going for the third training session?

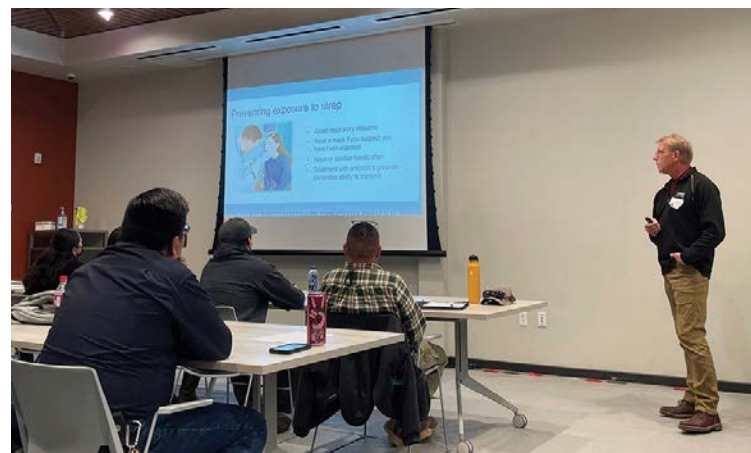
Mike: We are going to Fort Defiance and Chinle. These are utility outposts around the area.

MMUA: Tell me about some other opportunities for future partnerships.

Joe: They are building their safety staff and their training staff. The utility has a safety and employee development manager, and she is building a program. There are perhaps some opportunities to partner with them in the future, depending on how they build their program. It was nice to make a connection with her and begin building a relationship so that maybe there can be more collaboration down the road. It is something we can explore as they continue to grow further.

MMUA: Were there any challenges?

Mike: When Joe asked me to come down, it was only a couple of weeks until we were headed out. It took me some intensive study to get up to speed. I asked Anthony (Lenz) to tape himself so I could watch his presentation and absorb the information. I wanted to say the right things, and then I added my own stories to it. Once we went down there, everything went smoothly.



Joe Schmidt instructs on streptococcus infection at Navajo Nation.

MMUA: Mike said it was a life-changing experience. What were your takeaways, Joe, after finishing this training?

Joe: It was an eye-opener for me to realize that there is such a significant part of the United States that lives in a world that we don't know. Some 40 percent of the homes don't have running water. Equally as many don't have electricity. To think and know there is that much of a population within our continent that doesn't live the way we do is an eye opener. You would never know, when talking to the groups, who lives in that situation and who doesn't. Their outlook is different.

It might be because that is all that they have known. It's an amazing part of our world I

didn't know much about, and now I know more about it, and I want to know even more.

MMUA: Of anyone who could have been chosen to go work with the Navajo in this country, it was you guys. That is quite an honor.

Mike: It really is. The national average of people who got COVID and didn't survive was 1.1 percent. For the Navajo, it was 2.5 percent, more than twice the national fatality rate. That's a big number. Out of every 100 Navajo people who got COVID, two or three didn't make it. That's why we wanted to help.

Going to the Navajo Nation was a great experience. We will be going back in early September and can't wait!

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Underground School draws lineworkers to Marshall



Students line up their directional drilling operation.



Jeff Libbesmeier from Primus Marketing taught students how to “keep it clean” while doing 600-amp terminations.



Thursday dawned a bit rainy, as Jessie Lloyd (L) from Fairmont Municipal Utilities and Tommy Flores (R) from Marshall Municipal Utilities presented on circuit isolation and switching.



Brad Olson from Brainerd Public Utilities taught troubleshooting secondary while Evan Boike from Rouzer Group presented on troubleshooting and fault-finding primary cable in the back-ground.



Chad Peterson from Rochester Public Utilities spoke to students.



Apprentices join Roger Avelsgard, MMUA’s new Apprenticeship and JT&S Instructor (ninth from left) for a group photo.

Competent Person and Excavation Safety Workshop meets

What is a competent person?

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) a “competent person” is someone “who is capable of identifying existing and predictable 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.”

Students at MMUA’s workshop in Marshall on May 23 and 24 learned about being a competent person, as well as methods for safely navigating confined spaces, trenching, and excavations.

The workshop has been put on since 1999, and was a bit unusual this year because it didn’t rain for once! Andy Smoka, who has taught since that inaugural year of 1999, had his last school this year. MMUA thanks him for his dedication and hard work in teaching scores of students about being safe. United Rentals, which has been there many times in the past, joined Andy with great instruction from Derrick Chamley and Joel DePons.

Continued on page 11



Andy Smoka, a former Principal Safety Consultant for OSHA MN, presented on excavation safety on Day 1.

Competent Person

Continued from page 10



Derrick Chamley and Joel DePons from United Rentals discussed trench and excavation safety, as well as confined spaces. A large increase in trench fatalities occurred in 2022, jumping to 39 from 17 in 2021, so this topic deserved special attention this year.



Andy Smoka led the excavator, driven by Tommie Flores, down to the training field.



A trench box is set into the trench.



Joel DePons talks about the correct way to assemble a trench box.

Rochester Public Utilities (RPU) announces appointment of Tim McCollough as General Manager

From Rochester Public Utilities:

On May 16, The RPU Board announced the appointment of Tim McCollough as the incoming

General Manager for RPU. Mark Kotschevar, who started with RPU in 1981 and has led RPU since May 1, 2014 and will retire with 42 years of service to the

community. McCollough is anticipated to start July 31, 2023.

McCollough most recently served as the President and Chief Executive Officer for Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative. Prior to serving Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative, he was the Deputy Director of Light and Power Utilities for the City of Fort Collins. McCollough started his career at MidAmerican Energy Company, holding several roles before transitioning to City of Ames Electric where he served as a Power Plant Engineer, Electric Services Operations Superintendent, and Electric Distribution Manager. Tim has a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from Iowa State University.

“We were pleased to have many qualified candidates apply for the General Manager position, and Tim stood out in several ways. His impressive work history at multiple utilities will bring new insights and best practices to RPU. The utility industry is undergoing rapid change, and his emphasis on continuous improvement and partnering with others for success will allow RPU to continue to set the standard for service. Finally, his empathetic leadership style with a focus on employee well-being and customer

service is integral to our community values and the culture of a hometown utility. We look forward to Tim joining our team,” shares Melissa Johnson, President of the RPU Board.

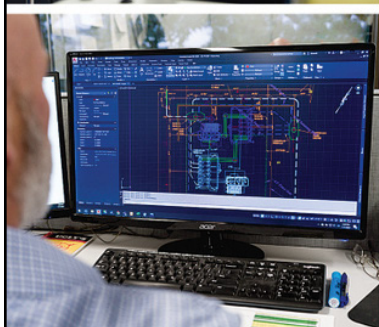
Key focus areas of the role include:

- Lead and implement a strategic vision and plan for RPU in collaboration with and under the direction of the RPU Board.
- Oversee long term infrastructure planning including generation capacity, amount of purchased power, transmission facilities, electric distribution system, well water capacity, water storage facilities and water distribution system.
- Lead RPU operations in a manner that results in high customer service satisfaction levels, leveraging of resources, and continuous improvement.
- Serve as an RPU and City representative explaining and discussing views, interests and policies to the RPU Board; City Council; state and national organizations
- Provide sound fiscal management of RPU budgets and finances.

McCollough highlights, “I am thrilled to join RPU as the next General Manager. I am deeply



impressed by the vision and forward-thinking approach that RPU embodies. The opportunity to engage with the Board of Directors and the employee team during the recruitment process has solidified my belief that RPU and the community are comprised of exceptional individuals who are dedicated to serving the well-being of the community with the utmost professionalism and integrity. Together, we will navigate the evolving challenges in the utility industry and continue to provide the highest level of service to the community of Rochester. I look forward to bringing my family to join the community soon.”



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Cities with water utilities may participate in **PFAS litigation**



From the League of Minnesota Cities:

Cities should work with their city attorney to determine if they should register to be part of litigation to recover costs due to contamination of public water supplies.

A Multidistrict Litigation (MDL) set in the United States District Court of South Carolina is getting a lot of attention lately. The South Carolina court is handling over 2,500 cases from across the country involving aqueous film-forming foams (AFFFs) and PFAS (perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances) contamination.

This litigation is known as MDL-2873 and currently includes hundreds of local governments suing to recover costs due to contamination of public water supplies. Other plaintiffs in the MDL are individuals with traditional product liability cases alleging that exposure to AFFF caused cancer. Although many different companies made and sold products containing PFAS, 3M and DuPont are the primary defendants in this litigation.

Potential impact to League members
Minnesota Rural Water

Association (MRWA) is partnering with the National Rural Water Association (NRWA) to educate cities with water utilities about MDL-2873. Many League members are also members of MRWA. They have received this information and are now asking whether they should register to be part of the “NRWA PFAS Cost Recovery Program.” By “registering,” a water utility will be connected with a law firm serving as co-lead plaintiff counsel in MDL-2873. The city will answer a few questions and then decide if it wants to join this litigation.

In other words, the city will need to decide to retain Napoli Shkolnik PLLC for participation as a party in the MDL, the benefit of which could potentially give it priority or other unique status in any settlement to recover current and/or future costs associated with PFAS testing, treatment, and remediation. However, if a city chooses not to register, this does not necessarily mean it will be excluded from accessing settlement funds in the future. Even cities with no PFAS detected, but with later contamination issues, may have access to funds because the exact terms of any settlement are still being figured out.

Time is of the essence

Water utilities are encouraged to work with their city attorneys to decide what is best for them. However, timing may be important because water provider cases pending in MDL-2873 have been selected as bellwether cases, meaning they will be tried first.

The first bellwether test trial is scheduled for June 5, 2023, in the case of the City of Stuart v. 3M Co. et al. The City of Stuart case involves claims that AFFF contaminated Stuart’s municipal water system. Plaintiff attorneys believe that the pressure of this trial may trigger a global settlement deal with at least some of the defendants. They also believe a settlement could create a tiered system in which claims are ranked into tiers based on factors like the strength of a plaintiff’s case and the sequence of when a plaintiff joined the MDL. It is speculated that cases ranked in the highest tier will get bigger settlement payout offers compared to those in lower tiers.

Seven Minnesota municipal utilities earn **APPA RP3 designation**

On May 1, the American Public Power Association (APPA) released its list of public power utilities to receive the Reliable Public Power Provider (RP3) designation for providing reliable and safe power to their communities.

The designation lasts for three years.

Utilities receive the designation for illustrating excellence in four different areas: safety, workforce development, safety improvement, and reliability. Utilities send an application to APPA, where it is reviewed by an 18-member panel of public power professionals from across the country. Designated utilities are recognized as gold, platinum, or diamond, based on the number of points they earn from their application. Gold

designees earn 80 to 90 percent of all possible points. Platinum designees earn 90 to 98 percent of all possible points. Diamond designees receive 98 to 100 percent of all possible points.

Hutchinson Utilities and Brainerd Public Utilities received a gold designation. Elk River Municipal Utilities has received a platinum designation. Willmar Municipal Utilities, Marshall Utilities, Detroit Lakes Public Utilities, and Alexandria Light and Power received a diamond designation. These utilities are in addition to other Minnesota municipals that are currently designated.

MMUA congratulates all new and current RP3 utilities on their excellence in operations and for this national recognition.

GOLD

Hutchinson Utilities
Brainerd Public Utilities

DIAMOND

Willmar Municipal Utilities
Marshall Utilities
Detroit Lakes Public Utilities
Alexandria Light and Power

PLATINUM

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2023. Thanks to an amendment carried in the Omnibus State Government Finance Bill (Chapter 62), the effective date has been moved from August 1, 2023, which would have made June 19, 2024, the first observance of the new holiday, to June 19, 2023. Therefore, Juneteenth is a state holiday this year.

- Chapter 7 (HF7): Carbon-free standard imposed. By 2040, an electric utility will need to provide all their retail customers with electricity generated by 100 percent carbon-free methods. The mandate also includes interim requirements of 80 percent carbon-free by 2030, and 90 percent by 2035. The mandate applies whether the utility produces or procures the electricity. In addition, power will also need to be from a source that is, or sources that are, 25 percent renewable by 2025 and 55 percent renewable by 2035.

To qualify as renewable, the source must be considered an “eligible energy technology”, as that term is defined by Minnesota Statutes Section 216B.1691. For most municipal utilities, their joint power associations will be required to ensure compliance, and the use of renewable energy credits will be allowed to achieve conformity with the new standards. In addition, a utility that is unable to satisfy the new standards due to no fault of its own, or without increasing rates excessively, can apply to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) for a modification to, or waiver of, the standards. Chapter 7 was signed into law on February 7, 2023, and the most relevant provisions to municipal utilities took effect on February 8. Unfortunately, an amendment to Chapter 60 that would have made it mandatory for the MPUC to grant the modification or waiver upon finding satisfaction of the criteria, was stripped out of that bill in conference committee. MMUA will continue to work toward similar legislation in the future.

- Chapter 24 (HF1656): Competitiveness Grant Fund Established. An early success of the session was the creation of a new account providing state money to be used as matching funds for eligible recipients of federal grants under the Infrastructure Improvement and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The bill allocated \$115 million as the initial funding for the program, with \$106 million being allocated for grants (mostly those under \$1 million each) and the rest going towards administrative costs and providing technical assistance to would-be

applicants. See Chapters 53 and 57 for additional funding information. Chapter 24 was signed into law on April 18, 2023, and the funding was made available as of April 19.

- Chapter 39 (HF 24): Lead drinking water service lines replacement program and grants established. This law provides \$240 million in fiscal year 2024 (beginning July 1, 2023) to the Public Facilities Authority (PFA) to provide grants and loans to municipalities and other eligible entities to map, plan, and replace lead water service lines. Chapter 39 was signed into law on May 16, 2023, with program provisions of the bill taking effect May 17 and funding becoming available to the PFA as of July 1.
- Chapter 53 (SF 3035): Omnibus Jobs, Labor, and Economic Development Bill. In addition to serving as the budget bill for jobs, labor, and economic development agencies and programs, this year’s bill contains provisions of interest to municipal utilities. One such provision is a temporary exemption from the need to draw a permit for the replacement of load management devices, and the law further exempts such installation from needing to be re-inspected if certain criteria are met, such as the installation being done by a qualified electrician. This exemption ends December 31, 2028.

The bill is also the vehicle for a portion of the state’s new paid family leave, sick and safe time protections, which will be summarized in more detail at a later date. Finally, this bill also finances the Competitiveness account established in Chapter 24 with a \$115 million appropriation to be transferred to the account by June 20, 2025. The same distribution of funds as set out in Chapter 24 applies to the second appropriation. Chapter 53 was signed into law on May 24, 2023, with the load management exemption taking effect May 25.

- Chapter 57 (SF 2744): Omnibus Commerce Bill. The new law clarifies that the \$115 million appropriation made in Chapter 24 is really a transfer of surplus general funds so that pre-existing money is used without having to short a department’s FY 2023 budget when it ends June 30, 2023. It also clarifies 2023 funding is retroactive to April 19, 2023. Chapter 57 was signed into law May 24, 2023.
- Chapter 59 (HF 2) creates a new paid family medical and safety leave program. A detailed summary of this Chapter will appear at a later date. Chapter 59 had not yet been signed into law as of the publication deadline for this

article, although the Governor has made it clear he intends to sign it.

- Chapter 60 (HF 2310): Omnibus Environment and Energy Bill. Contains both new regulations and funding for per- and pol fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) cleanup efforts. The law establishes a new climate resiliency and water infrastructure grant program, allocating \$50,266,000 in FY 2024 and \$50,270,000 in FY 2025 to fund the grants to local governments and tribes. The money will be available through June 30, 2027.

The law also establishes and funds a new “Green Bank” program.

The law funds a municipal liaison position to help municipalities navigate the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System/State Disposal System (NPDES/SDS) permitting process. This law also introduces the concepts of environmental justice and cumulative impact, which may pose challenges to utilities in the seven-county metro area, in a city of the first class, or within 1 mile of a census tract that is part of an Environmental Justice Area. More information will be made available as it is released from the state, especially as the Pollution Control Agency begins the rule-making process.

The new law also authorizes funding for “pre-winterization” efforts, such as vermiculite removal. It provides \$2 million to the city of Granite Falls for repairs to the city’s hydro-electric facilities. It establishes a new “Solar for Public Buildings” program, but only funds it for structures in Xcel territory at the present time so that Renewable Development Account (RDA) funds are used. It is likely the program will reach outside of Xcel territory and into municipal utility territory in the future. The program would require the grant applicant to work with its local utility to resolve any foreseeable interconnection issues before receiving a grant. The law also expands both the scope of and funding for the “Solar for Schools” program. With the utility’s permission, a school could install solar equipment to generate up to 1,000kW.

This law also has a number of other provisions, including requiring the Department of Commerce to study and report on storage capacity needs to help meet the mandates affiliated with the 100 percent carbon-free standard adopted in early February. It makes reporting date changes to the cold-weather rule to coincide with the expanded effective dates of the rule

that were adopted in 2022. It imposes a 10-day window in which to provide a customer with requested data about their energy usage, and also imposes new benchmarking requirements but exempts all municipal utilities except for Duluth and Rochester. The law establishes a diversity reporting mandate but exempts all municipal utilities. It also establishes a grant program to assist cities and other entities in developing local climate action plans, and it allocates a little more than \$5 million for municipal utilities and electric cooperatives for resiliency grants.

Chapter 60 was signed into law May 24, 2023, and has assorted effective dates.

- Chapter 62 (HF 1830): Omnibus State Government Finance Bill. This law has a number of provisions covering a wide array of topics. For example, it requires a redesign of the state seal and flag. It changes the start date for a legislative session in an odd-numbered year to the first Tuesday after the second Monday in January, effective for the 2025 session. The law also changes the definition of a “legislative day” to one where a bill is given its third (final) reading, or when a confirmation vote or similar final action is taken on the floor of either body.

The law creates an automatic confirmation if the confirming entity fails to act within a set period of time.

The law also establishes an Infrastructure Resilience Advisory Task Force to “...evaluate issues related to coordination, sustainability, resiliency, and federal funding on state, local, and private infrastructure...” in Minnesota. MMUA will be allowed to appoint one member to this body.

The law now allows a public official to participate in a

meeting using interactive technology if the person has been advised by a health professional to avoid public places for the health of the person or the person’s family. It also authorized a “Construction Manager At-Risk” process for contracts over \$175,000, and it repeals the local government salary cap effective the day after the bill’s enactment (May 25, 2023.) As mentioned earlier, it moved up the date the Juneteenth holiday (June 19 of each year) is effective in Minnesota from 2024 to 2023. Chapter 62 was signed into law on May 24, 2023.

- Chapter 63 (HF 100): Legalization of Recreational Marijuana Use. A separate summary of this bill and how it interacts with utilities will be forthcoming. It should be noted that no changes have occurred to Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) requirements regarding the use of marijuana even if legal statewide. Chapter 63 was signed into law on May 31, 2023, and it takes effect on August 1, 2023.
- Chapter 68 (HF 2887): Omnibus Transportation Bill. This law carries a number of provisions related to IIJA and IRA funds as they apply to various types of infrastructure and resiliency. Chapter 68 was signed into law on May 24, 2023.
- Chapter 71 (HF 670) and Chapter 72 (HF669) work together as this year’s Omnibus Capital Investment Bills. Together they account for over \$3 billion in cash and bonds to fund a wide variety of direct projects and programs such as the Public Facilities Authority (PFA), which provides grants for water and wastewater projects. Numerous MMUA members should benefit from this unprecedented investment in infrastructure. Chapters 71 and 72 were signed into law on June 1, 2023.

Xcel receives grants for iron-air battery system from Gates-backed fund

Grants from the Bill Gates-backed funding platform Breakthrough Energy Catalyst will provide \$20 million to help Xcel Energy develop its battery storage project in Becker, Minnesota, as well as in Pueblo, Colorado.

The projects will consist of a solar farm combined with an iron-air battery system that will provide storage when the sun is not shining.

Iron-air batteries are larger than lithium-ion batteries, and they also store electricity more cheaply and for longer periods than lithium-ion batteries. Iron air batteries work by absorbing oxygen and turning iron to rust. When electricity is applied, the rust is turned back to iron. The process allows the batteries to charge and then release energy.

Brainerd Public Utilities reformats leadership

On May 2, former Brainerd Public Utilities co-department head Todd Wicklund assumed the newly created position of public utilities director, becoming sole head of the utility.

The position combines the previous leadership roles of superintendent and secretary/finance director. Wicklund was chosen for

the new position after a search process yielded three internal candidates including Wicklund.

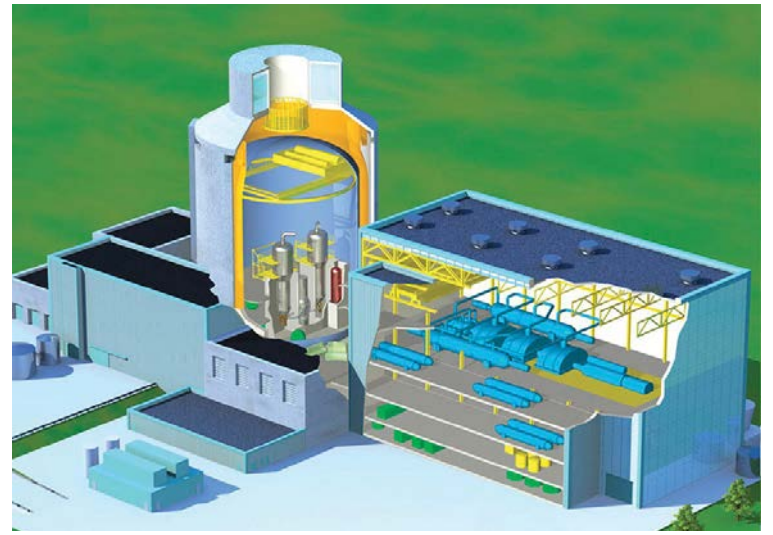
With the restructuring, previous superintendent Scott Magnuson had his position eliminated. The change came after a commission discussion about creating a leadership structure that was more in line with similarly sized utilities.



Westinghouse announces small modular nuclear reactor plans

Westinghouse, the king of American nuclear reactors in the postwar era, announced plans on May 4 to build their own small modular nuclear reactor in a program that would see construction of a reactor by 2030.

In contrast to Westinghouse's older reactors—such as the units installed in Minnesota at Monticello and Prairie Island—the new nuclear reactors will be significantly smaller while still generating about 60 percent of a conventional reactor's power. Westinghouse's planned reactor, dubbed the AP300 SMR, will generate 300 megawatts of power and will be able to fit on



a sports field.

Westinghouse expects the small reactor to operate for more

than 80 years, also longer than the traditionally sized nuclear reactors made by the company.

FERC Chairman Phillips speaks to Senate panel

On May 4, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Chairman Willie Phillips addressed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, discussing FERC's efforts to speed up permitting and increase grid modernization activities.

The permitting of gas infrastructure was of special focus, as Phillips discussed the Commission's work to make these energy resources available quickly and in a safe manner.

Phillips has been Acting Chairman of FERC since January 2023.

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Jim Bruender joins MMUA



Jim Bruender has joined MMUA as Safety Coordinator for the south-central region.

Jim has worked in the utilities space for over 35 years, including stints as General Superintendent, Utilities and Superintendent of the Wastewater Plant for the City of Mankato.

Jim is a member of the American Public Works Association and the Central States Water Environment Association. His experience across utility types and strong safety orientation will be invaluable for member utilities. Welcome, Jim!

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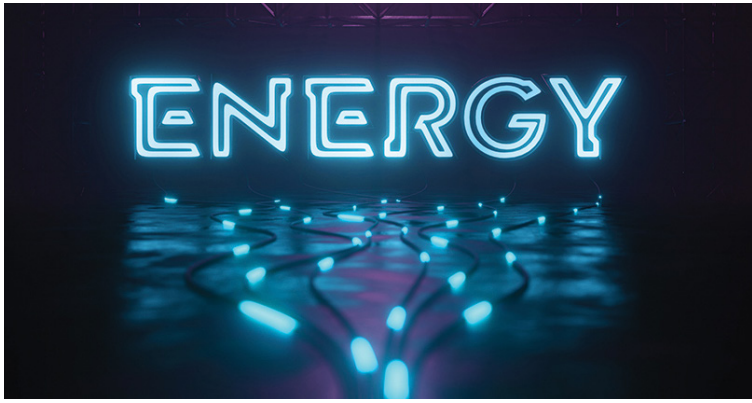
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2023 Minnesota Energy Factsheet reveals statewide energy trends



In late April, the 2023 Minnesota Energy Factsheet was released.

The factsheet, which is compiled by Clean Energy Economy Minnesota and The Business Council for Sustainable Energy, illustrated several interesting trends that are emerging in Minnesota's energy industry.

The transition to renewables looks less daunting as the report notes that Minnesota is already receiving 55 percent of its power from zero-carbon sources. A complicating factor is that a large percentage of that power is coming from Minnesota's three nuclear reactors, which provided

24 percent of Minnesota's energy mix in 2022.

Similar to national trends, Minnesota's 2022 generation capacity additions were 96 percent wind and solar, with only 4 percent coming from other renewables and carbon-based sources. Related to this rapid renewable transition is the amount of power sector emissions. Minnesota now has power industry emissions that are 50 percent below 2005 levels.

A not-so-positive Minnesota energy trend is the rising cost of electricity. Consumer electricity rates in 2022 were 8 percent higher than in 2021, and 27

percent higher than in 2013. The report attributed the rise to utility infrastructure investments, as well as higher natural gas prices in 2022.

Minnesota continues to be a leader in energy efficiency, ranking 10th nationally as the result of its energy efficiency programs. In 2020, each dollar spent on a conservation improvement program generated \$4 in benefits.

The state continues to become more self-reliant in the energy space. Minnesota used 66 terawatt-hours (TWh) of electricity in 2022 and only imported 5.9 TWh. This was the lowest amount of imports in 20 years. Just 9 percent of all power used in Minnesota was imported, which is a 25 percent reduction from a decade ago.

There are many bright spots in this report, as well as difficulties that still need to be addressed. Overall, Minnesota's energy production sector is meeting its challenges and, in many cases, leading the nation in areas like efficiency, emissions, and renewable technologies.

Colorado eliminates municipal broadband obstacles

On May 1, Governor Jared Polis signed into law a bill that will eliminate restrictions that have stifled the development of municipal broadband in the state.

Under a 2005 law, Colorado municipalities were previously required to hold a local election approving the implementation of municipal broadband service.

Under the new law, municipalities can now either establish

broadband systems on their own or in partnership with service providers without holding a vote. The new rules will facilitate easier access to federal broadband money that has been made available through several programs.

The law passed the Colorado Legislature with strong support. The House voted in favor of the bill 48-14, with the Senate voting in favor 31-4.



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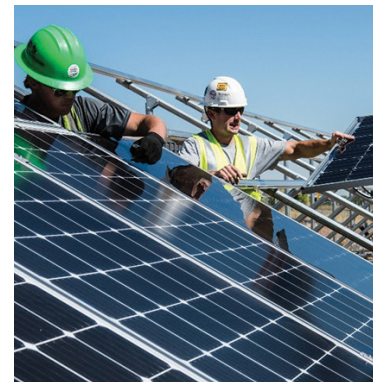
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Xcel plans expansion of Sherco Solar project



On May 8, Xcel Energy announced that it is planning an expansion to the forthcoming Sherco Solar project near Becker, Minnesota.

Instead of 460 megawatts (MW), the project will add a 250 MW solar array to reach a total of 710 MW for the project.

This level of production will help Sherco Solar surpass the nameplate capacity of the original Sherco coal plant, which could produce 680 MW of power. The new project will be able to provide electricity for 150,000 homes.

If the plant opened today, it would be the 22nd largest solar farm by production in the world, and the fourth largest in the United States. Construction began on Sherco Solar in April 2023, and completion of the original 460 MW project is expected by mid-decade.

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Duluth receives \$700,000 grant to study wastewater heating process

Duluth has received a \$700,000 federal grant to study the use of waste heat from effluent at the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District for heating buildings in the city's Lincoln Park neighborhood.

In the process, 95-degree water from the wastewater treatment plant will be increased in temperature to 130 degrees and then used in heat pumps.

If funded, the project could be 90 percent covered by federal funds. The system has been used internationally but has not yet been implemented in the United States. The plan will be studied for 11 months, after which time a design for the full project could be submitted to the government for funding.



New Turkish solar plant is fifth largest in the world

On May 2, the Kalyon Karapinar Solar Power Plant opened in Turkey, marking a significant advance in renewable energy in that part of the world.

The plant is the largest in Europe as well as the fifth largest in the world.

The facility's statistics are staggering in their enormity. The company says that the plant consists of 3.5 million solar panels covering land the size of 2600

football fields. The panels will produce 3 billion kilowatt-hours (KWh) of electricity per year, serving the electricity needs of two million people. All of the solar panels were manufactured in Turkey.

The plant cost \$1 billion to construct. Kalyon Karapinar was developed by the Turkish conglomerate Kalyon Holding with funding provided by several groups of investors.




Arkansas city plans hydrogen power plant

Officials in a city in northwest Arkansas, Clarksville, signed an agreement on May 12 to construct the Syntex Hydrogen Power Plant.

The 500-megawatt (MW) plant will be completed by 2026.

The agreement was made in partnership with Syntex Industries, which will develop the power plant. The plant will be built in phases, with the first phase ramping up to 50 MW. The second phase will then take the plant to its nameplate capacity of 500 MW. The 500 MW plant will be completed by 2026. When finished, the plant will employ 100 new full-time workers.



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Scientists develop first battery that is completely edible

Italian scientists in Genoa, Italy, have created the first completely edible battery, a completely digestible device that can be used in the body for medical purposes.

The battery is made of vitamin B2 for the anode and plant pigment quercetin for the cathode. The battery's electrolyte is made out of water, and the electrodes are made of beeswax and food-grade gold foil.

The battery is in its early stages, as it is currently only able to provide power for around an hour. However, this technology will have many future biological applications where power is needed.

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Audubon swore in a new chief of police on May 8. Chief Ben Weidemann has more than 20 years of law enforcement experience and was most recently with the White Earth Police Department, which he joined in 2017.

Garrett Larson, who owns Ronnings Department Stores in **Baudette, International Falls, Roseau, and Thief River Falls**, has been named the Minnesota Young Entrepreneur of the Year. The award, which is sponsored by the Small Business Administration, honors a small business owner who is under the age of 30.



Blue Earth reviewed a proposal from the Active Living Coalition that will establish 12-15 miles of two-way loop bike trails in the city. The move would get Blue Earth closer to a "Bike Friendly City" designation.

Brewster's historic bandshell was damaged by fire on May 10. The fire was suppressed quickly because the bandshell is directly across from the Brewster Fire Hall. The structure is not believed to be a total loss, and the cause of the fire is still under investigation. The bandshell was constructed in 1939.

Lucas Spaeth, **Halstad's** superintendent of utilities, is working to find new uses for the former Halstad school that closed in 2018. The school's former shop and garage area have been leased to Sheet Metal Air Rail and Transportation Local 10 as a training center for their apprentices, and the building is being used for community events. Many more plans, including possible apartments, are in the works.

Minnesota's oldest resident, **Moorhead's** Lillian Moran, celebrated her 112th birthday on May 4. Lillian lived most of her life near Maddock, North Dakota.



With assistance from a \$116,000 state grant, buses used by **Moorhead** Public Schools will soon be equipped with stop-arm cameras. The cameras will pick

up traffic violators who pass a school bus when the stop arm is out.

New Ulm Public Utilities is surveying customers about the materials their water lines are made from, so the utility can move forward on replacing the publicly owned section of all lead service lines in the city over the next few years.

Randall's water treatment plant is back online after 10 months. The plant was heavily damaged after flooding that occurred on June 24, 2022.



At its April 24 meeting, the **Rushford** Council approved entering into a PFAS Cost Recovery Program. Registering

for the program will help the city recover any costs coming from treating or testing for PFAS.

A chlorine cylinder at a **Willmar Municipal Utilities** water treatment building began leaking on May 12, causing a short section of County Road 5 to be closed that afternoon. The issue was completely resolved in a few hours, and no injuries were reported.

Willmar also continues to review plans for a new city hall and community center, including options in the old JC Penney store in the Uptown Willmar



Mall, and a plan at the site of the current community center on north Highway 71.

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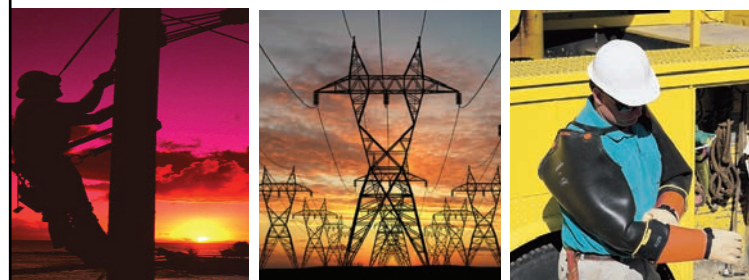


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On April 27, Governor Kathy Hochul of New York announced a budget deal that included banning the use of natural gas in new buildings throughout the state.

Minnesota's struggles with whether and how to expand nuclear power as part of the carbon-free future are on the national stage. On May 1, the *Christian Science Monitor* covered the ongoing tension between pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear views in Minnesota through the lens of the recent tritium water spills at the Monticello Nuclear Power Plant. The title of the piece summarizes its findings: "Is Nuclear Power Attractive or Risky? In Minnesota, It's Both."

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has signed into law \$100 million in grants that will go to 16 Florida counties where hurricanes in 2022 and 2023 damaged storm or wastewater systems.

Treatment Plant Operator reported in its May edition that the Midwest Biosolids Association has formed. The organization will drive cooperation among participants in the biosolids industry, share information, promote correct management of biosolids, and educate the public about organics recycling.

On May 8, NextEra Energy Partners announced that it would be selling all of its natural gas pipelines and focus exclusively on renewable energy by 2025. NextEra owns and operates energy projects in 30 states including Minnesota.

Microsoft has agreed to purchase 50 megawatts of fusion power from Helion Energy, which is developing a fusion power plant. The plant is expected to come online by 2028.

Three Wisconsin utilities: Xcel Energy, Alliant Energy, and Madison Gas and Electric have filed for 2024 rate increases with the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin. Two other utilities, Wisconsin Public Service and We Energies, are expected to request rate increases later this year. For 2024, Alliant asked for an electricity rate increase of 8.4 percent. Xcel asked for an increase of 4.8 percent, and Madison Gas and Electric asked for a rate increase of 3.75 percent.

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1 www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes49051.htm 2 www.bls.gov/oes/2017/may/oes49052.htm 3 www.bls.gov/oes/2017/may/oes47152.htm

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San Francisco plans to do a large upgrade of its wastewater facilities in order to better deal with rain from heavy storms.

A section of Venice, Italy's famed Grand Canal suddenly appeared "nuclear waste green" in color on May 28, confusing visitors and residents alike. The cause was found to be fluorescein, a non-toxic chemical used in testing wastewater networks. The canal was last colored green in 1968 when an activist dyed it green to advocate for the environment. As of press time, Italian officials do not know who or what was behind the color appearing in the water.

The Times of Israel reported on May 30 that the country will build a new gas-fired power station and expand another to meet its energy needs. The new plant, called Kesem, will be located in central Israel, while the expanded power station, Dorad, is located in the southern coastal city of Ashkelon.

Two juveniles have been identified by authorities for their involvement in an April 2023 wastewater plant fire near Diamond City, Arkansas. The blaze at the Sugarloaf Wastewater Treatment Plant damaged the facility and caused the release of partially treated wastewater into the East Sugarloaf Creek area of Bull Shoals Lake.

The third nuclear reactor at Georgia's Plant Vogtle reached full power output on May 29 and is scheduled to enter commercial operation in June.

In a study published in the journal *Advanced Materials*, scientists at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst discussed the potential of using air humidity to produce clean power. Humidity "harvester" devices could run continuously and supplement home energy use. In a publication from UMass, Jun Yao, assistant professor of electrical and computer engineering in the College of Engineering, and the paper's senior author explained the concept. "Think of a cloud, which is nothing more than a mass of water droplets. Each of those droplets contains a charge, and when conditions are right, the cloud can produce a lightning bolt—but we don't know how to reliably capture electricity from lightning. What we've done is to create a human-built, small-scale cloud that produces electricity for us predictably and continuously so that we can harvest it."

California wastewater plant looks to a self-sustaining future

A wastewater plant in Richmond, California is looking to make itself entirely self-sustaining, as well as capable of providing electricity to other wastewater facilities in its organization.

The California-based utility is partnering with the French energy company ENGIE to make it happen.

ENGIE has worked on similar projects in the past, but the Richmond project will take their

work to another level. For starters, the company will install a 1.1-megawatt solar plant at the wastewater plant to provide electricity. The plant will also improve its biosolids management system so that biosolids can be used for biogas and crop fertilizers.

Reusing the biosolids instead of dumping them, taken together with the solar project and other improvements, are expected to reduce the plant's greenhouse

gas emissions by 93 percent and save more than \$83 million over the life of the plant.

The biogas generated by the plant will be connected to a new 450-kilowatt cogeneration system that will produce power for the plant. When all the work is completed, Richmond will have a wastewater plant that will be as close to carbon neutral as possible, while producing useful byproducts for its region.

Chinese scientists treat antibiotics in wastewater

In a study published in the *Journal of Hazardous Materials*, a team of scientists from the Hefei Institutes of Physical Science at the Chinese Academy of Sciences used plasma technology to treat antibiotics in wastewater.

The problem of antibiotics in the environment has been an issue for decades. As antibiotics enter the environment, they allow bacteria to adapt to antibiotics and become resistant over time. As more bacteria become resistant to leading antibiotics, this poses risks to fighting infection and preventing injury and death.

Now, the Chinese team believes they have a solution. In wastewater, the scientists treated the antibiotics with a cold atmospheric plasma, which is composed of reactive oxygen, reactive nitrogen, charged particles and photons in an electric field. Hydroxide and oxygen,



as well as other components of the plasma, were able to break down the antibiotics, producing elements like chlorine.

The team will continue to explore the use of plasmas in neutralizing antibiotics before they enter the environment.

Largest federal investment in rural electrification since the 1936 Rural Electrification Act announced: \$11 billion coming for rural renewables

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced on May 16 that \$11 billion in federal funds will be made available to rural utilities, cooperatives, and renewable energy companies to further drive the transition to renewable energy.

Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture, said that these funds will be the largest investment in rural electricity since the 1936 Rural Electrification Act, which brought electricity to much of rural America for the first time.

The investment consists of two parts: the Empowering Rural America Program, which will make \$9.7 billion available for rural cooperatives to create renewable energy infrastructure, and \$1 billion for electric utilities



in rural America as well as renewable energy companies.

The Empowering Rural America program application period is between July 31 and August 31. The Powering Affordable Clean

Energy program application period is between June 30 and September 29.

Funding for the programs comes through the Inflation Reduction Act.

Owner of diamond ring found at Rogers wastewater plant identified

A diamond ring found in March at a Metropolitan Council wastewater treatment plant in Rogers, Minnesota has been reunited with its owner.

The identification was made by sifting through photos and descriptions of hundreds of lost rings submitted by individuals. Two jewelers made the final

identification when they concurred that it was a match. The ring was returned to the owner on May 15.

The ring was apparently lost 13 years ago. A press conference was held on May 17, where the owner thanked wastewater plant personnel for finding the ring and searching for its owner.

Upcoming Events

Emergency Preparedness and Restoration Conference

July 12-13
Holiday Inn, St. Cloud

Join other hometown utility and city professionals at this interactive conference rescheduled from February. Register by June 20 at mmua.org/event/emergency-2023.

Summer Conference and Trade Show

August 21-23
Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center

The Summer Conference will be held in Duluth this year! The theme at MMUA's flagship event this year is "Resiliency". Learn about the challenges facing the industry and connect with fellow utility leaders. Learn more by visiting mmua.org/event/summer-2023. Register by July 22 for best rate.

Minnesota Lineworkers Rodeo

September 12
MMUA Training Center, Marshall

The Rodeo is a free competition for MMUA members featuring three events, including hurtman rescue, an obstacle course, and a mystery event. Learn more by visiting mmua.org/event/rodeo-2023. Deadline to register is August 15.

Overhead School

September 12-15
MMUA Training Center, Marshall

Overhead School is an ideal venue to stay current on best practices for safety and technique while up on the lines. Learn more by visiting mmua.org/event/overhead-2023. Register by August 5 for best rate.

For more information, see the Events Calendar at www.mmua.org or call MMUA at 763.551.1230.