

OCTOBER 2017

The VPU office will be closed on the following dates:

- November 10, 23 & 24
- December 22 & 29 (at noon)
- December 25, 2017
- January 1, 2018



YOUR LOCAL ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROVIDER

How to Apply: The Energy Assistance Program funding year runs October 1st - May 31st. Applications for Energy Assistance are accepted until the end of September. Applications received after 5/31/18 will not receive an Energy Assistance grant but may be used to qualify for other programs. Households that received Energy Assistance in the past year should have received a new application in September. If you are interested in applying for Energy Assistance or Weatherization, please contact the Virginia office at 749-2912 office for an application and more information.

Customer Notice: Fuel Assistance Information

If you receive Fuel Assistance, there are some things you need to keep in mind when receiving your utility bill each month from VPU:

- Fuel Assistance can only be used to pay your heat and/or a portion of your electric bills.
- Fuel Assistance does not pay for water, sewer, garbage, taxes, notice, or penalty charges.
- You are responsible for paying all charges on your utility bill, by the due date each month, that are not covered by Fuel Assistance.

Fuel Assistance comes to VPU in monthly payments. If the Fuel Assistance payment received at VPU does not cover your heat and/or your electric bills in full, you are responsible for paying the remainder by the due date on your monthly billing.

Remember, your fuel assistance payments may reach us by a date other than the date shown on your Award Letter from the Fuel Assistance Program.

IF YOU CAN'T PAY YOUR BILLS IN FULL EACH MONTH, TALK TO SOMEONE IN THE UTILITY OFFICE.

You can be disconnected during the Cold Weather Season (October 15 through April 15) even if you receive Fuel Assistance. It is your responsibility to contact VPU to set up a Payment Arrangement. If you have any questions, please call Mary Johnson at 748-2113.

The 2017 Cold Weather Rule is available in our office or can be found on our website at www.vpuc.com under the "Links" tab.



We all can use a little help sometimes. That's why caring people are ready to lend a helping hand—just when you need it most. Locate the best source of assistance by calling 2-1-1. 211 is a fast, free and confidential way to get connected with resources in your community.

Call and talk with a trained specialist 24/7/365 to find out about community health and social services in your area. When you call, you'll talk to a trained specialist who will assist you in finding the right information for you.

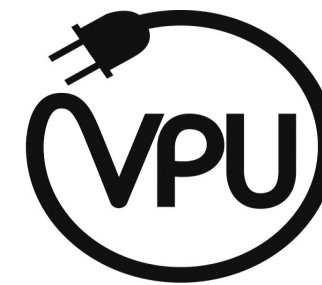
Call 2-1-1 to speak to a specialist who will assist you to locate services in your area. (Cell phone users call 800-543-7709) All phone calls are free and confidential.

HeatShare is a Salvation Army program that provides emergency utility assistance for people with no place left to turn. The program is funded in part by Salvation Army donors and customers of local utility companies. Funds are typically used to pay for natural gas, oil, propane and electricity. To learn about HeatShare and The Salvation Army go to www.heatshare.org.

HeatShare is a last resort for people who've exhausted all other private and government assistance programs. Although HeatShare does not receive government funding, the amount of government funds available for other heating assistance programs directly impacts HeatShare. When funding for these other programs runs out, more people need HeatShare.

Call 1-800 842 7279 to see if you qualify.

If you wish to contribute to HeatShare, send your donation to the Salvation Army, 2445 Prior Ave., Roseville, MN 55113 or visit heatshare.org and donate on-line. All donations are tax deductible and will be used in our community.



Virginia Public Utilities

The VPU Quarterly is a customer newsletter published by the City of Virginia, Minnesota Department of Public Utilities.



VPU — QUICK NOTES

KNOW THE SMELL OF NATURAL GAS—BE SAFE!

If there is a faint smell of natural gas, call VPU at 218-748-7540.

If in doubt, leave the building immediately & call 9-1-1.

STREET LIGHT OUT?

If you notice a street light that is burnt out or flickering, please call VPU at 748-7540 so that we may get it fixed and keep our streets bright!

Before You Dig,

Contact Gopher State One Call

Dial 1-8-1-1 or 800-252-1166 or www.gopherstateonecall.org

CHECK YOUR WALL PATCHES

If you have steam heat in your home, or an abandoned steam line to your home....

Periodically check the wall patch where the steam enters your building for leaks.

If you have a vacant property please check property often, as damage can occur quickly...

Call 748-7540 with questions.

That Hole in the Alley

Similar to a recent article about "a lot of 'guys with shovels' standing around a hole", this article is intended to explain why it is that it seems we are not getting to the hole in your alley.

Put simply, repairing a steam leak is a seven step process. First, usually long before the crews begin digging, we listen for the leak, we watch how rainfalls evaporate and how the snow melts in the area of the leak. Second, once we're confident about where the leak is, we open up the hole, carefully digging to expose the steam piping so we can work on it. Third, we then size up the quality of the pipe, and the number of customer connections in the immediate vicinity of the leak. Fourth, the replacement pipe is fabricated either in our shop, or, if it's a long section of pipe, above the trench. Fifth, once fabricated, it's time to install the pipe section, which means the steam gets turned off to a section of customers, the old pipe is cut out and the new pipe is hoisted down into the trench and propped or held in place. At that time the welder begins his work, and, believe me, it is slow work. Generally one weld around a six inch steam main will take two hours. There are two such welds and then there are the connections necessary to connect up the customers affected by the change-out. Once the welding is complete, the steam is turned back on. Then, sixth, usually starting the next day, the pipe is insulated, the tunnel is rebuilt and, seventh, the hole is back-filled and compacted. A couple weeks later, after the soils have been allowed to compact a bit, an asphalt patch completes the job.

In a perfect world, exposing the pipe can take three days, fabricating the piping is done on the fourth day, the pipe is installed on the fifth day, and then, on the sixth and seventh days, the pipe is insulated, pre-formed tunnel is installed, and the hole is back-filled and compacted.

From a customer perspective, however, there are times when it looks like we just open holes and leave. Frankly, we hate leaving holes open. But here are a few things that can, and often do, happen. First, our staff typically fabricates the replacement piping here at our shop. Yes, even though no one is working at the site, the project is still being worked on. But the customer sees the hole standing open with no one around. Second; rain. Rain makes it impossible and unsafe to weld. It doesn't allow the pipe to heat up evenly for a strong weld. Plus, arc welding is simply not safe in the rain. So, if it's raining, or if there's a reasonable chance it'll rain during the day, that hole remains open with no one around. Third, other emergencies require our staff to address more pressing problems. This past month, for example, right when we were hoping to make progress on several steam projects, we had two major water breaks and one minor one. Our outside distribution staff were transferred to those emergencies. And the hole remained open with no one around. In addition, heavy rains fill our steam tunnels with water and staff need to be reassigned to pumping out certain steam manholes all throughout town – of which there are roughly 500. And that hole in your alley remains open and now it's a muddy, glumpy mess, with no one around.

Folks, again, we really don't like leaving holes open, but sometimes we have no choice, and sometimes they end up being open for quite some time. Yes, we understand that there are risks in leaving these holes open. We will continue to do our part by marking these construction sites clearly and getting these holes filled as soon as is reasonably possible. We ask that, those of you who are parents, warn your children of the dangers and tell them to stay away from these construction sites (like my Dad did, "If I catch you on that trestle, it's 40 lashes."). And drivers, we ask that you do your part in being safe by not moving our barricades and finding ways to avoid our work zones. But most of all we ask you, and thank you, for your patience and understanding.