WINTER IS ON IT'S WAY

Virginia Department of Public Utilities is once again asking for your help keeping steam manholes free of excess snow. When snow is thrown onto steam manholes, the snow melts, drips onto the pipes, and causes them to rust and eventually leak - increasing maintenance costs. The melting snow also cools the steam pipes, causing the steam in the pipes to condense. When this goes through your system, your steam billing goes up.

Also, remember to keep access areas to all outside meters shoveled. Meters can then be read and serviced when required. It is especially important to keep gas meters and regulators free of snow and ice to prevent malfunctioning.

Gas meter protection can be as simple as :

- Use a broom (not a shovel) to clear snow from your meter, regulator & vents.
- Remove icicles hanging above your meter.
- Sweep snow away from outside openings of natural gas appliances (such as a clothes dryer).
- Install a temporary cover in the winter.
- If your meter becomes encased in ice call us.

Call for more suggestions (218)748-2104

ADOPT A HYDRANT: If you have a fire hydrant near your home and are able, please keep the hydrant clear of snow.

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.

HeatShare is a Salvation Army program that provides emergency utility assistance for people with no place left to turn. Funds are used to pay for energy costs for seniors, disabled and families in crisis. The program has been active since 1982 and helped 4200 families in Minnesota last year with $1 million in assistance. HeatShare is offered at The Salvation Army corps. 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 send a donation to HeatShare, 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.

October 2016

The VPU office will be closed on the following dates:

November 11, 24 & 25
December 23 & 30 (at noon)
December 26, 2016
January 2, 2017

The VPU Customer Newsletter is published quarterly 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!

Call Before You Dig.
Be sure to call 8-1-1 or Gopher State One Call at 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

An Informational Newsletter for Customers of the Department of Public Utilities, Virginia, Minnesota

VPU Customer Newsletter

THE "GRID" AND YOU

There have been some pretty significant changes in the way electricity gets delivered these days and it has had a very significant impact on you. But before I get into our current situation it would be good to cover a bit of history.

Only about 150 years ago did people start using electricity in their homes, primarily for lighting. Either a private business or a city would take the initiative (and risk) of establishing a power plant to serve homeowners and businesses interested in electric power. Thus for some 30-40 years cities became islands where people had electricity. Rural areas went without. With the Rural Electrification Act (REA) of the 1930's the electric cooperative movement began to develop and flourish. Their vast networks of power lines provided power over the mostly agricultural lands that were in their newly designated service territory. Meanwhile private operators, called independent service operators (ISOs), and cooperatives merged and the use of more significant transmission lines to move power from ever larger and larger power plants to the consumer became the norm. Likewise, municipal utilities began forming power agencies to build generation facilities and transmission lines to feed multiple cities. In our region Minnesota Power began partnering with small municipal utilities like us to provide back-up power, to meet part of the city load, or, in many cases, agree to provide power for an entire city. Thus a patchwork, or grid, of interconnectedness across the country was created.

About twenty to thirty years ago, we saw how this uncoordinated patchwork was highly vulnerable to collapse. Rolling blackouts, brown-outs and vast power outages signaled the need for better coordination. This gave impetus to the establishment of about ten service operators across the country whose purpose is to coordinate power flow. In Virginia we are part of the Midwest Independent Service Operators (MISO) group. Their function is to constantly monitor production and transmission of electricity across their multi-state territory. They also serve as a vehicle for the coordination and building of transmission lines that more effectively address overloads and improve reliability throughout the grid. Not only has the strengthened grid improved our country's ability to move power, but it has also created an ability for producers and consumers to buy and sell power. For example, when the mining companies reduce production, MP has a choice to make: either take generation off line or sell that generation into the market on an hour by hour basis. Other producers then decide to either buy that power at the market price or generate their own. It is the ISO coordinates that market activity. So now a power company in Kentucky can sell its production to an end user in Minnesota. This market dynamic and the ability to move power has created downward price pressure and has allowed public utilities across northeast Minnesota to negotiate a better long-term contract with MP. That's a plus for you. We recognize that MP is a valuable partner in this region and MP recognizes that the Municipal Utilities in this region are an important stable part of their load.

Lastly, the recent push for renewables, especially wind, has created even more need for these coordinating groups. The inherent unreliability of solar and wind (solar only works when the sun shines and wind is even less predictable) does not match well with consumers preference for "power at the flick of a switch". Because of the strengthening of the grid these new power sources can be connected to the grid and power essentially transported thousands of miles to the end user. Operators of these facilities have improved their ability to predict their output a day or so in advance and as a result, the reliance on a handful of power plants to meet a regions need is enhanced by having these alternative sources. MP has created a situation where they can "store" wind power. Wind generation essentially replaces the hydro generation they would have used, leaving the water behind the dam for future use. It is this kind of ingenuity that has optimized these new resources and allowed these mandated investments to trickle down to the benefit of the consumer.