

EF-3 tornado devastates Menasha, prompts mutual aid

A mile-wide path of destruction tore through Menasha on Monday, July 27, when an EF-3 tornado traveled down a central part of the community, tearing down homes, businesses, and power lines along the way. This was the most powerful tornado to hit the Fox Valley area in more than four decades. Packing a punch with winds of up to 140 mph, it hit Menasha particularly hard, causing significant and widespread damage.

Many homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed, and large swaths of trees were knocked down. More than 60 utility poles were impacted, including those supporting

two of ATC's transmission lines. Two substations were also damaged. All of the 9,500 customers of Menasha Utilities (MU) lost power.

MU's own Water Filtration Treatment Plant took a direct hit from the tornado, while employees inside took shelter and could see the tornado damage unfold via security system cameras.

MEUW immediately worked with Menasha Utilities and coordinated a Mutual Aid response, reaching out to nearby municipal utilities to seek crews and trucks. Mutual aid is a core value among MEUW's member utilities. When one community is impacted by disaster, others step up to help restore power and sup-



Milwaukee Journal Sentinel photo

port recovery efforts. At least 80 linemen from 25 Wisconsin municipal utilities contributed their skills at various points, with many other utilities offering to help.

Restoration efforts were hampered by the sheer volume of debris, with many roads unpassable and with access to poles and wires limited. Broken poles, tree limbs, downed

wires, and materials from damaged homes and buildings, among other things, needed to be cleared before crews could even begin to assess and restore the system. Additional challenges were caused by the amount of vehicle and foot traffic in the area, with people either seeking assistance or simply viewing the damage.

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Top photo: Drone footage shows the widespread and significant damage to homes and businesses near Plank Road in Menasha after a mid-day tornado impacted the community. **Bottom photo:** Dozens of linemen and other utility personnel posed for a photo as the sun rose for another full day of clearing debris, rebuilding power lines, and restoring electric service to the community.

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"I've never seen anything like this," said MEUW Director of Safety Services and Operations Mike Czupryny. "I've been part of several storm and hurricane Mutual Aid events, but I've never seen this much damage before. The crews had a lot of obstacles in front of them, but they all worked together so well and made it happen."

Thanks to the efforts of MU employees and Mutual Aid crews, power had been restored to 90% of the area and to 80% of customers within a week of the devastating storm. Many of the remaining customers incurred damage that will need to be addressed before reconnection can occur. Crews will remain as long as needed, as the community shifts from emergency response to long-term recovery.

Menasha Utilities' General Manager Melanie Krause said, "Please extend a huge thank you to all those that have responded to Mutual Aid and continue to support us." ●



Crews from 25 municipal utilities provided mutual aid support to Menasha Utilities

Cedarburg
Clintonville
Columbus
Gresham
Hartford
Juneau
Kaukauna
Kiel
Lake Mills
Manitowoc
Marshfield
Medford
New Holstein
New London
Oconomowoc
Oconto Falls
Plymouth
Shawano
Sheboygan Falls
Sturgeon Bay
Sun Prairie
Two Rivers
Waunakee
Waupun
Wisconsin Rapids

Associate members rush to contribute supplies for restoration, recovery effort

Having strong connections to vital supply lines is essential for municipal utility operations. True to form, many MEUW Associate Members immediately jumped in to help during storm recovery in Menasha. Phone calls and offers started coming in almost immediately, and they've brought equipment, tools, trucks, chainsaws, food and drink to support the crews working on restoration. Among those contributing:

- Milwaukee Tool delivered a truck filled with chainsaws and tools;
- Altec, Inc. provided extra bucket trucks for utility crews to use; and
- Irby coordinated with Bell Pole & Lumber to bring in 40 much-needed poles.

MEUW Associate Members are suppliers and service providers who have paid membership dues in support of those connections. In the July edition of *LIVE LINES*, we featured the names of these Associate Members in appreciation of their participation. MEUW truly values these partnerships and appreciates the support they routinely provide for our public power utilities.



This map shows the scope of the damage and the scale of power outages that affected the City of Menasha in the aftermath of the July 27 tornado. GPS mapping was replaced with old-fashioned paper maps and markers to plan repair work.

Timeline of events in Menasha tornado response

Monday July 27

Severe weather with strong winds moves through the Fox Valley region, spawning a mid-day tornado that affected large portions of the City of Menasha.

The tornado takes out poles and transmission lines serving the Menasha Utilities (MU) substation; the entire Menasha community loses power.

MEUW begins mobilizing crews to provide mutual aid in Menasha.

By late Monday, crews from 11 MEUW member utilities are onsite helping assess the damage and clear extensive debris.

ATC crews replace poles and lines, restoring the feed to the Menasha substation.

Tuesday July 28

Many roadways in and around Menasha are blocked by fallen trees and debris; crews focus on clean up and setting poles.

Gov. Tony Evers declares a State of Emergency.

Wednesday July 29

Power began to be restored to Menasha residents able to accept electric service.

MEUW calls for additional mutual aid crews to plan for a weekend of storm recovery.

Thursday July 30

Gov. Evers tours the damaged sites in Menasha and activates the National Guard to assist with debris removal, traffic and safety support.

Clean-up is expected to take weeks, with recovery lasting months and years.

On July 28, the National Weather Service confirmed an EF-3 tornado, with wind speeds up to 140 mph that traveled 12.1 miles, reached a maximum width of 1,500 yards, and was on the ground for 26 minutes. The powerful storm is believed to be the strongest to impact the Fox Valley in more than 40 years.

Educating lawmakers about public power priorities is essential

By Tyler Vorpagel

While we're still in the middle of summer, with primary elections right around the corner and the general election approaching in November, now is the perfect time to start planning for our 2027 advocacy activities. That includes the annual American Public Power Association (APPA) Legislative Rally in Washington, D.C., and MEUW Day at the Capitol in Madison next spring.

This November's elections will determine control of the House and Senate, both of which are currently held by slim Republican majorities. Here in Wisconsin, we'll also have a new governor and new legislative leadership, regardless of which party holds the majority.

Wisconsin has always had outstanding representation at APPA's Legislative Rally, and your advocacy continues to make a difference. Last year's message to Congress

about protecting tax-exempt municipal bonds as a financing tool for utility infrastructure clearly resonated. When the

APPA Policy Makers Council (PMC) met with members of Congress in Washington, D.C., in July, lawmakers immediately recognized the issue and reaffirmed the importance of preserving these bonds for our utilities.

Another key topic was the critical role the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) plays in

helping utilities request and provide mutual aid. Given the storms we've experienced in recent months, there is no shortage of real-world examples to share about why that support matters.

Wisconsin has maintained a strong voice on the PMC, with three members currently serving on the 40-person national council. Kaukauna Utilities Commissioner Lee Meyerhofer recently served as chair, and Cedarburg Light &

Water Utility Commission President Andy Moss was just elected second vice chair, putting him in line to lead the

committee. (He edged out Marshfield's Mike Eberl in what I'm told came down to a coin flip.) The PMC — made up of local government leaders from municipal utilities across the country — meets each summer in the nation's capital to reinforce the same priorities raised during the Legislative Rally: maintaining affordability, protecting municipal bonds, ensuring electric reliability, advancing energy permitting reform, and supporting FEMA. These follow-up meetings help keep public power's issues front and center with Congress throughout the year.

Your participation in these advocacy opportunities truly makes a difference. I encourage you to join us at the APPA Legislative Rally in Washington, D.C., Mar. 1–3, 2027, and consider bringing your mayor, council members, commissioners, or key utility employees to help tell our story. And if you know someone in your local government or on your commission who would be a good fit for the PMC, please let me know. The more voices we have at the table, the stronger and more united our message becomes.



Tyler Vorpagel is MEUW's Director of Legislative and Regulatory Relations. He can be reached at tvorpagel@meuw.org



Wisconsin was well represented when APPA's Policy Makers Council gathered in D.C. in July. Joining the meetings with lawmakers were (from left) Lee Meyerhofer (Kaukauna), MEUW's Tyler Vorpagel, WPPI Energy's Joseph Owen, Mike Eberl (Marshfield), and Andy Moss (Cedarburg)

**Friends of
PUBLIC
POWER**

MEUW is built on the foundation that municipal electric utilities deserve a voice in happenings at the Capitol in Madison. For 95 years, our association has championed policies and advocated to preserve the public power model. Increasingly, money is a channel for political participation. Through Friends of Public Power, the political action committee and conduit managed by MEUW, the association directs financial resources to support in-state legislative candidates who have signaled their support for public power and the electric-utility industry. Many of these same politicians have shown a willingness to listen to and learn about the issues that matter to MEUW and its member communities. Like other trade associations, we recognize the importance of political giving and developing good relationships with key lawmakers. Dollars raised are directed to both Republican and Democrat candidates in races for the Wisconsin Assembly and State Senate.

To learn more about MEUW's political giving, please visit www.meuw.org/fpp. ●

What municipal utilities need to know about bankruptcy practices



By Nicholas Bratsos
Boardman and Clark

As utility revenues come under pressure from delayed and missed customer payments, municipal utilities in Wisconsin are increasingly attentive to broader economic and financial trends that can affect customer solvency. Bankruptcy filings nationwide have been trending upward in recent reporting periods, with total filings increasing by more than 13% year-over-year through March 31, 2025.¹ Nationally, there were 542,529 total bankruptcy cases in the year ending June 30, 2025, with Chapter 7 filings accounting for over 330,000 of those cases and more than 8,400 Chapter 11 filings.² These figures reflect sustained financial pressure on both residential and commercial utility customers.

Within Wisconsin specifically, bankruptcy data from the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin shows continued activity across both individual and business cases, including regular monthly Chapter 7 and occasional Chapter 11 filings throughout 2025,³ underscoring the very real potential for municipal utilities to encounter insolvent customers entering bankruptcy.

Rules for Commercial and Nonresidential Deposits

Wisconsin's regulatory framework provides municipal utilities with tools to manage risk and secure payment for utility service. Under the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSCW) rules, utilities may require deposits from commercial accounts as a condition of providing service:

- Electric utilities may impose commercial and farm deposits pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code, § PSC 113.0403, authorizing deposits based on factors like credit history and risk of nonpayment.
- Water utilities serving non-residential accounts likewise may require security deposits under § PSC 185.361, allowing utilities to obtain financial assurances ahead of service initiation or continuation.

These deposit authorities enable municipal utilities to obtain security in advance that can mitigate the impact of subsequent customer defaults — a particularly salient point for larger nonresidential customers whose financial instability may precede or presage potential bankruptcy filings.

Forms of Guarantee and the Intersection with the Bankruptcy Code

Section 366 of the Bankruptcy Code is meant to balance utility providers' general right to refuse to do business with a debtor post-petition and a debtor's need for utility ser-

vice. Congress attempted to strike this balance by protecting debtors from utility shutoffs for the first few weeks after filing, but also giving utility providers a special right to "adequate assurance" of future payment while a bankruptcy case is pending.

Historically, prior to enactment of the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act (BACPA) in 2005, bankruptcy courts frequently considered a debtor's pre-petition history of timely utility payments in assessing what constituted adequate assurance of payment. For example:

- In *In re Best Products Co.*, 203 B.R. 51 (Bankr. E.D. Va. 1996), a bankruptcy court accepted a deposit equating to one-half of an average monthly bill as adequate assurance where the debtor had regularly paid utility charges and had no pre-petition default.
- In *In re 499 W. Warren Street Associates Ltd. Partnership*, 138 B.R. 363 (Bankr. N.D.N.Y. 1991), a court approved a deposit equal to one month's average billing based on the debtor's solvency and expected ability to meet post-petition obligations.
- In *In re Spencer*, 218 B.R. 290 (Bankr. W.D.N.Y. 1998), where prepetition defaults were part of the record, a two-month average billing deposit was upheld as adequate assurance.

These pre-BACPA decisions reflected a flexible judicial inquiry into a debtor's payment history and prospects for future payment.

The landscape shifted significantly post-BACPA with the adoption of 11 U.S.C. § 366(c). In Chapter 11 cases, under Section 366(c)(3)(B)(ii), bankruptcy courts are prohibited from considering *pre-petition* timely payment history in determining whether a utility's requested adequate assurance of payment is reasonable. This statutory bar means that even customers with historically reliable payment patterns cannot rely on that history to forestall additional security requirements post-petition.

Post-BACPA cases emphasize that if a Chapter 11 debtor fails to provide adequate assurance within 30 days of filing, the utility may alter, refuse, or discontinue service. 11 U.S.C. § 366(c)(2). While courts can, upon notice and hearing, modify a utility's demand for assurance, they may not weigh pre-petition security absence, prior timely payments, or the availability of an administrative expense priority in determining what constitutes adequate assurance. In Chapter 11 cases, utilities may also use security deposits provided before the petition date to satisfy delinquencies without separate notice or court order.

Adequate assurance is not the same as an absolute guarantee of payment. But utility providers are empowered to demand what they believe is adequate

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^[1] <https://www.uscourts.gov/data-news/data-tables/2025/06/30/bankruptcy-filings/f>

^[2] <https://www.uscourts.gov/data-news/data-tables/2025/06/30/bankruptcy-filings/f>

^[3] <https://www.wieba.uscourts.gov/bankruptcystatistics/2filing>

FERC orders new reliability standards for AI data centers, other large loads

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has directed the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) to develop mandatory reliability standards for large computational loads, including AI data centers, cryptocurrency mining operations, and other high-density computing facilities.

Issued on July 16, the order requires NERC to file new or revised Reliability Standards by Dec. 31, 2026, along with proposed registry criteria identifying which computational-load entities will be subject to mandatory compliance. NERC must also submit a Phase II work plan for additional standards by March 1, 2027.

The action reflects growing concern over the rapid expansion of large electricity users whose power demand can change almost instantaneously, creating voltage and frequency disturbances that threaten grid reliability.

“Certain large loads like data centers and crypto mining operations ... have the potential to change their demand almost in-

stantly,” FERC Chairman Laura Swett said. “This rapid fluctuation causes voltage stability issues that threaten grid reliability.”

FERC's order formalizes work NERC had already begun through its Large Loads Working Group, which has spent the past two years studying the reliability risks associated with emerging computational loads. Earlier this year, NERC issued its highest-level Essential Action Alert requiring utilities and other registered entities to take immediate steps to improve modeling, protection, and operational practices related to these facilities.

While FERC did not prescribe the specific technical requirements, the new standards will include proposed registry criteria identifying which computational-load entities should become subject to NERC's mandatory reliability framework.

Utilities, grid operators, and developers should expect increased regulatory oversight and new reliability requirements aimed at ensuring rapidly growing loads from AI can be integrated without compromising the stability of the Bulk-Power System. ●

Bankruptcy practices

Continued from page 4

assurance where a debtor is at risk of defaulting on its payment obligations.

Moreover, provision of adequate assurance does not prevent a utility from terminating service to the debtor or the estate if post-petition payments for utility services are not made after the statutory waiting period. Such a termination must follow the procedure prescribed under non-bankruptcy law for the disconnection of utility service.

For municipal utilities, this statutory framework underscores that adequate

assurance is evaluated independently of past payment practices, focusing instead on the security necessary to protect the utility from the ongoing service risk.

Offsets, Letters of Credit, and Security Instruments

Municipal utilities commonly obtain letters of credit, cash deposits, surety bonds, or similar guarantees. Under Section 366(c) (4) a utility may recover or set off against a security deposit provided prepetition without notice or court order. This provision can be particularly valuable to municipal utilities in addressing post-petition delinquencies while retaining rights to adequate assurance going forward.

In sum, the bankruptcy code provides mechanisms to protect municipal electric and water utilities for post-petition payments. Before a petition is filed, municipal utilities with commercial customers with payment issues should obtain deposits or guarantees consistent with PSCW rules. These protections remain intact even if the customer subsequently files a bankruptcy petition. ●

Nicholas Bratsos is an attorney with Boardman and Clark law firm in Madison. He joined the firm in March 2026, and his practice includes municipal and construction litigation, dealership law, and commercial disputes.



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LIVELines

Official monthly publication of **Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin, Inc.**, the statewide trade association representing the interests of Wisconsin's public power providers since 1928.

This e-newsletter is distributed to more than 1,200 utility professionals and leaders throughout Wisconsin and the Midwest on the first Tuesday of every month.

LIVE LINES has been published continuously for many decades and provides useful information, news on emerging utility issues and legislation, updates on events, training programs and member services, as well as engaging feature stories spotlighting utilities, communities and leaders.

Reader comments and suggestions are welcome — send by email to news@meuw.org

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An archive of past issues of *Live Lines* is available at www.issuu.com/meuw

APPA signs White House Ratepayer Protection Pledge

American Public Power Association (APPA) President and CEO Scott Corwin on July 23 participated in a White House event to reaffirm public power utilities' commitment to ensuring customers are not burdened with costs caused by infrastructure investment to meet growing data center demand.

"We are pleased to be a signatory to the Ratepayer Protection Pledge on behalf of public power, which aligns with our position that other utility customers should not bear the brunt of the costs of serving data centers," said Corwin. "It reinforces our long-standing focus on energy affordability and reliability for public power utility customers."

Public power utilities are already acting to protect their customers. Many have adopted, or are developing, rates, terms, and conditions for new large-load customers.

APPA said it appreciates the Administration's recognition of the importance of protecting electric customers from the costs of serving large data centers.

In early March, the White House hosted an event with seven major hyperscaler AI companies where they signed the Ratepayer Protection Pledge containing specific actions to help protect other electric ratepayers. To learn more about the pledge, see this [White House fact sheet](#).

To learn more about what APPA is doing to advance affordability, review the [Public Power Affordability Agenda fact sheet](#). ●

September event will focus on energy affordability

The Customers First Coalition (CFC) will host its annual Power Breakfast on Tuesday, Sept. 15, in Madison. The forum will bring together policymakers, energy leaders, and stakeholders to discuss energy affordability and to explore the key factors driving rising energy costs in Wisconsin.

Presenters are expected to discuss how global fuel markets, infrastructure investment, and customer usage influence energy bills, and how effective utility regulation helps manage these pressures. The event will be held at the Premier Park Hotel in downtown Madison. Learn more [here](#).



MEUW is a founding member of CFC, which was originally formed more than 25 years ago, and has helped to shape energy policy that promotes consensus among Wisconsin's energy stakeholders and produces sensible solutions to today's energy challenges. MEUW President and CEO Tim Heinrich is currently serving as Chair of the CFC Board of Directors. To learn more about CFC, visit customersfirst.org. ●



Public power utilities across the U.S., including the 81 operating in Wisconsin, celebrate **Public Power Week** the first full week of October every year to help customers and stakeholders understand how they can better engage with their community-owned utility and benefit from all its offerings. MEUW member utilities have access to sample resources and templates to spread the word and help celebrate in their hometowns. Details are available [here](#), along with a link to additional resources available from APPA. This year's events will happen Oct. 5–9.

Recent storms are reminder to refresh your mutual aid plan

Every MEUW utility has access to a customized guidebook to help prepare for and manage a mutual aid event when it's needed. The Mutual Aid Community Resource Guide is available [here](#) (member login is required).

The Resource Guide was developed based on lessons learned and feedback from past mutual aid events and includes various tools necessary for a well-coordinated mutual aid response, including roles and responsibilities, key contacts, and pre-planning details for critical facilities, lodging, and meals. The guidebook is a Microsoft Excel document with multiple tabs, which allows for everything to be kept in a single location and makes it easy to update. The guidebook's comprehensive Table of Contents is linked to each form for quick access, and each tab is formatted for simplified printing. ●

Submit ideas for topics and presenters at 2027 Electric Operations Conference & Expo

The annual gathering of municipal utility and electric cooperative employees from across Wisconsin is set for Jan. 13–14, 2027, and event organizers are working to identify topics and presenters to make the event informative and worthwhile for all who attend. The focus of the 2027 event is resilience and reliability — hallmarks of energy service. Utilities, suppliers, and consultants are invited to submit ideas they can present to conference attendees during a large-group general session (30 minutes or less). This will be an opportunity to showcase a project or share important insights by presenting information about a compelling and relevant topic of interest to leaders in utility operations. The "Call for Presenters" form is available [here](#). The deadline to submit an idea is Friday, Sept. 11.

In case you missed it ...

DNR alerts utilities to be vigilant amidst ongoing cybersecurity threat

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recently contacted public water and wastewater utilities to take immediate steps to protect programmable logic controllers (PLCs) from an ongoing cyber threat targeting internet-connected devices. The advisory follows reports of successful attacks in neighboring states that disrupted system operations.

Utilities are encouraged to review the affected PLC manufacturers, ensure devices are not directly accessible from the internet, verify current security updates, and report any suspected incidents to the Wisconsin Statewide Intelligence Center (WSIC).

For more information and recommended actions, review the advisory on the federal government's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's [website](#).

Members' NEWS

Fisher Kotnick recently joined New Holstein Utilities as an Apprentice Lineman.

Send us your news! Tell MEUW about new hires, promotions, retirements, honors, and awards, so those tidbits can be shared in MEUW member communications. Simply send an email to news@meuw.org to share your news.



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MEUW NEWS Monitor

Wolf promoted to new role to support strategy, execution



MEUW has promoted Sharon Wolf to a new role as Director of Communications and Member Engagement. She first joined MEUW in March 2023 as Manager

of Communications and Events, bringing with her extensive experience in the utility industry. The promotion recognizes Sharon's efforts to support MEUW's strategic priorities and the Board of Directors' efforts, including enhancing member communication and engagement. She continues to report directly to President and CEO Tim Heinrich.

Basics of Utility Rate Setting course to be offered Sept. 22

Join your peers for this new one-day workshop on the basics of utility rate setting, including cost-of-service and rate design. Members have consistently expressed interest in a foundational session on electric rate setting, and this training is designed to meet that need. The full-day workshop will provide practical insights for municipal employees, as well as help local utility commissioners and governing body members gain a clearer understanding of the rate-making process. The training is planned for Tuesday, Sept. 22, in Mauston. Information about registration is available [here](#).

Accounting & Customer Service Seminar is Sept. 23

You won't want to miss MEUW's annual one-day seminar that brings together municipal electric utility staff with a focus on accounting and customer service topics. Attendees receive updates on regulatory and legislation that affect their utilities and compare best practices to improve their operations. MEUW's Accounting and Customer Service

Committee assists MEUW staff in putting together the day's program to address industry topics. This year's seminar is planned for Wednesday, Sept. 23, in Mauston. Additional information and registration are available [here](#).

Utility Planning and Risk Management class set for Oct. 7

As part of MEUW's professional development programming, we're launching a new one-day course to focus on utility planning and risk management. Taught by experienced engineer, Dave Krause, this training will explain the basics of strategic and operational planning, why planning matters, and how well-thought-out plans and careful assessments of risks can contribute to long-term success. The class will be held in Mauston on Wednesday, Oct. 7. Registration and details about the class and instructor can be found [here](#).

Associate Member renewal time is almost here!

Having strong connections to vital supply lines is essential for municipal utility operations. MEUW Associate Members are suppliers and service providers who have paid membership dues in support of those connections. The Associate Member year runs from Oct. 1–Sept. 30 each year. Current Associate Members can expect to receive renewal information in the coming weeks. Full details about the Associate Member program and the benefits available are [here](#).

Member Roundtable sessions kickoff late next month

MEUW will once again host Member Roundtables around the state in September and October, providing local utility leaders an opportunity to connect and network on topics of interest to public power. Members are encouraged to attend one of the five scheduled sessions, along with their utility commissioners or elected officials, to receive updates and participate in roundtable discussions. Planned locations and dates are:

- Tuesday, Sept. 29: Bloomer
- Wednesday, Sept. 30: Juneau
- Thursday, Oct. 1: Hartford
- Thursday, Oct. 8: Clintonville
- Thursday, Oct. 15: Richland Center

While there is no cost, advance registration is required. Each session will begin at 9 a.m. and wrap up by 1 p.m. Registration is available [here](#).

Tuesday, Aug. 11
is primary election day
in Wisconsin



A fast-moving, severe thunderstorm impacted the community of Eagle River on the morning of July 27, bringing a lot of lightning strikes and quarter-sized hail. The 45-mph winds toppled trees and took down six poles, impacting more than 300 customers. MEUW activated a mutual aid event, and crews from five municipal utilities answered the call. With the help from crews from Clintonville, Marshfield, Medford, New London, and Wisconsin Rapids, service to nearly all Eagle River Light & Water customers was restored by 1 a.m. July 28 with service fully restored to the remaining customers by 2 p.m.

MEUW Employee Spotlight: Brian Johnson reflects on five years

This is the first in a series of articles (thanks to a suggestion from MEUW's recent communications review) to help members learn more about the MEUW team. In this article, MEUW Regional Safety Manager Brian Johnson offers reflections on his first five years providing support for MEUW members.

In July, I celebrated five years of service with MEUW. While this milestone is certainly meaningful, it has also provided an opportunity for reflection. I feel incredibly fortunate to work alongside such outstanding people not only within my region, but across the entire state.

As I look back on my time in this position, I realize how much I have grown professionally and personally. That growth has not come primarily from advanced safety courses or additional certifications. Instead, it has come from learning that effective leadership requires not only being a teacher, but also being a student. I have learned the value of listening to and learning from our membership. The diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of our members represent an incredible source of knowledge that has expanded and strengthened my own understanding. For a long time, I failed to recognize the depth of that resource. Once I did, I began to appreciate the tremendous opportunity to learn from those I serve.

Reflections from Five Years in Safety Leadership

Leadership involvement strengthens safety culture. Conducting field audits alongside leaders is far more effective than conducting them independently. I have learned that when leadership actively participates in the audit process, it not only reinforces the organization's safety culture but also elevates accountability among employees. More importantly, it sends a clear message that working safely is an expectation that is fully supported by leadership.

Approach matters as much as the message. The individuals I work with are professionals and experts in their respective fields. When difficult conversations are necessary, I have learned that how I communicate is just as important as what I communicate. Presenting information with respect and professionalism can determine whether the message is accepted or rejected. Respect is essential for building trust, maintaining credibility, and fostering long-term relationships.

Presence has value. Being present may seem like a basic part of the job, but I have learned that it carries significant value. I do not always have to speak about safety when spending time with crews in the field. Simply being there as a Safety Manager demonstrates commitment and support. In many cases, meaningful safety discussions arise naturally, even when safety is not the initial topic of conversation.

Follow through on your commitments. When someone asks a question that cannot be answered immediately, it is important to follow up and provide an answer as promised, even if it is not the answer they hoped to hear. Consistently doing what you say you will do builds credibility and strengthens relationships.

Reliability and accountability are foundational to effective leadership.

Be willing to admit mistakes and apologize. One of the most important lessons I

have learned is the value of humility. I recall conducting an audit where I discussed several observations with a crew on-site. Later, in my written report, I included additional concerns that

had not been discussed during our conversation. The crew was understandably frustrated. Looking back, I could not blame them. I immediately returned to speak with them, apologized, and assured them I would handle situations differently moving forward. That experience reinforced a critical lesson: trust is the foundation of everything we do as safety professionals. Without trust, safety programs, conversations, and initiatives lose their effectiveness. Trust is not just important in this role, it is everything.

As I begin my sixth year with MEUW, I am grateful for the lessons learned, the

relationships built, and the opportunities to continue growing. The greatest realization from these past five years is that the most valuable knowledge often comes from the people around us. When we remain humble enough to listen and learn, we become better leaders, better partners, and better safety professionals. ●



Brian Johnson joined MEUW on July 1, 2021, bringing more than 20 years' experience in operations, manufacturing, quality, safety, and training. A native of Eau Claire, he also worked as a business development manager for Safe-Fast, where he worked with customers and trained them on the latest OSHA safety rules. He also previously held roles with TTM Technologies, Great Northern Corporation, and Hutchinson Technology. Brian earned an associate's degree in supervisory management from Chippewa Valley Technical College. He lives in Altoona with his wife, Jamie, and has three adult children and two grandchildren.

Fun Facts about Brian:

I'd eat that ... "raw oysters"
Best new thing ... "weed flame thrower"
Bring back ... "the mullet"
Favorite game ... "golf"
Book I'd recommend ... "The OZ Principle"
Hidden talent ... "I'm a mean dancer!"

Wisconsin UTILITY NEWS Digest

Coal plant extension orders draw long-term cost concerns

Gov. Tony Evers is urging the Trump administration to stop using emergency orders to keep aging coal plants operating beyond their planned retirement dates, arguing the policy could cost Wisconsin ratepayers an estimated \$117 million over the next several years. The administration says the extensions help maintain grid reliability and reduce the risk of blackouts, while consumer advocates and environmental groups contend the plants are expensive, unnecessary, and increase electricity costs.

The Citizens Utility Board of Wisconsin has joined legal challenges to the federal orders affecting coal plants in Michigan and Indiana, arguing that costs are being unfairly passed on to utility customers across the Midwest, including parts of Wisconsin. Consumer advocates say long-term utility planning is a better approach than relying on repeated 90-day emergency orders and warn the policy could further increase electric bills that are already rising faster than inflation.

Nieto appointed Chair of NARUC Committee on Consumers and the Public Interest

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) Commissioner Kristy Nieto was recently appointed to serve as Chair of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) Committee on Consumers and Public Interest. NARUC is a non-profit organization founded in 1889 whose members include the governmental agencies that are engaged in the regulation of utilities and carriers in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The NARUC

State appellate court upholds constitutionality of Act 10

A Wisconsin Court of Appeals has upheld the constitutionality of Act 10, overturning a 2024 Dane County Circuit Court ruling that found the law unconstitutional. The appeals court determined the legal issues had already been addressed in previous state and federal decisions that upheld the law.

The lawsuit argues that Act 10's distinction between public safety employees — who retained collective bargaining rights — and other public employees violates the Wisconsin Constitution's equal protection clause. The unions challenging the law are expected to appeal, sending the case to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, where a liberal majority is expected to hear the case and issue the final ruling.

Committee on Consumers and the Public Interest brings together commissioners from across the nation to focus on the evolving role state commissions play in protecting consumers and upholding the public interest. The Committee fosters dialogue exploring ways to ensure fair and affordable utility service to support informed regulatory decisions, public participation, and improved consumer education and communication.

Lightning suspected in death of tree-trimming contractor

An out-of-state employee working as a subcontractor for We Energies died on July 27 following a suspected lightning strike. The 31-year-old from West Virgin-

ia was performing tree-trimming work in Whitewater. Emergency responders found him suspended approximately 60 feet above the ground; he was pronounced dead at the scene. Investigators found no evidence of contact with energized power lines and noted that storms were moving through the area.

State regulators deny request to reconsider finance requirement for data-center rates

The three-person PSC has declined to reconsider financial-guarantee requirements for certain hyperscale data center customers, effectively ending a June 10 petition from We Energies and developers. The approved rules require customers with credit ratings below A-, including Oracle, to provide cash or lines of credit to protect utility ratepayers. No commissioner moved to reopen the case by the July 9 deadline.

Milwaukee-based We Energies, the state's largest investor-owned utility, said the requirements add cost and reduce flexibility, potentially discouraging investment and job growth in Wisconsin. Oracle, which is challenging the rate structure in court and estimates the change could increase the annual cost by about \$100 million, said it remains committed to paying its full energy share and providing protections against ratepayer risk.

Consumer and environmental advocates welcomed the decision. The Citizens Utility Board of Wisconsin and Clean Wisconsin argued that Oracle's credit profile, debt, and exposure to a possible AI-sector downturn justify strong safeguards. They said weakening collateral requirements could shift unnecessary financial risk to We Energies customers. ●



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Municipal utility customers are maximizing energy savings

Wisconsin's municipal electric utilities had a strong year with Focus on Energy in 2025. Participation data for the year, verified against the independent 2025 evaluation report released in May, shows that public power customers generated more energy savings per project and squeezed more value out of every incentive dollar than the statewide average.

Higher Savings per Project

Residential municipal electric utility customers who completed a Focus on Energy project achieved an average of 7,628 kWh in lifecycle savings per project, the total energy the upgrade or technology saves over its full useful life, compared to 7,417 kWh statewide. Both figures come close to covering a full year of a typical Wisconsin home's electricity use, but the public power number edges ahead, about 11.6 months of coverage versus 11.3 months statewide. The pattern holds up once non-residential programs are folded in as public power customer projects saved an averaged 36,505 lifecycle kWh, enough to cover roughly four and a half years of a typical home's electricity use, compared to 36,089 kWh statewide. Demand savings followed suit, with these projects trimming 0.35 kW on average, more than 7% ahead of the 0.33 kW statewide figure.

Generated savings in 2025 tells a similar story. Across the full portfolio, public power customers' 2025 projects saved enough electricity to power roughly 6,170 homes for the year, compared to about 56,960 homes statewide.

More Energy Saved Per Dollar

The sharpest contrast shows up in the energy saved per dollar spent. Across the full portfolio, every incentive dollar paid to municipal electric utility customers returned roughly 110 kWh of lifecycle savings, compared to about 100 kWh statewide, nearly 10% more value per dollar spent. Residential

programs widen the gap: incentive dollars spent on public power customers returned 69 lifecycle kWh apiece, versus 57 kWh statewide, a 22% difference. The same incentive budget simply went further for these customers than it did for the state as a whole.

Program popularity: similar tastes, different emphasis

The same three offerings topped the participation list both statewide and among municipal electric utility customers: free energy saving product packs, heating and cooling equipment discounts, and smart thermostats. Free packs were a clear favorite, but played an even bigger role for public power customers, making up about 83% of residential participants in municipal utility territory compared to 77% statewide. Easy, no-cost participation clearly resonates with this group.

Beyond Pack participation, the two groups diverge a bit. Municipal electric utility customers made proportionally less use of the HVAC discount offering, about 10% of residential participants versus 16% statewide. Trade Ally Solutions offerings like heating-and-cooling upgrades and insulation and air sealing, which drew roughly half the participation share in municipal utility territory

that they did statewide. On the flip side, public power customers showed up more often in Focus' new homes program. Residential New Construction participation was more than double the statewide share, and commercial and industrial participation among municipal electric utility customers landed at roughly 1.3 to 2 times the statewide share. This signals a relatively strong engagement given the size of this customer base.

For municipal electric utility customers, the 2025 numbers point to a simple takeaway: Focus on Energy dollars go far in public power territory. Every project completed, and every incentive dollar spent, delivered more energy savings than the statewide average, savings that add up to real energy and cost savings flowing back into public power communities. ●



Public power customers generated more energy savings per project and squeezed more value out of every incentive dollar than the statewide average.

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Mutual Aid Hotline

When you need help, call MEUW – 24 hours a day, seven days a week – for help coordinating mutual aid assistance

1-844-MEUW-911
(1-844-638-9911)



Calendar of Events

T Sept. 8	Monthly Safety Call — 7:15 a.m.
T Sept. 22	Basics of Utility Rate Setting — <i>Mauston</i>
W Sept. 23	Annual Accounting & Customer Service Seminar — <i>Mauston</i>
T Sept. 29	Member Roundtable — <i>Bloomer</i>
W Sept. 30	Member Roundtable — <i>Juneau</i>
Th Oct. 1	Member Roundtable — <i>Hartford</i>
T Oct. 6	Monthly Safety Call — 7:15 a.m.
W Oct. 7	Utility Planning & Risk Management — <i>Mauston</i>
Th Oct. 8	Member Roundtable — <i>Clintonville</i>
Th Oct. 15	Member Roundtable — <i>Richland Center</i>
T Nov. 3	Monthly Safety Call — 7:15 a.m.
T Dec. 1	Monthly Safety Call — 7:15 a.m.
W Dec. 2	Leading Through Coaching — <i>Mauston</i>

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New London Utilities — [Journeyman Line Mechanic](#)

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[Utility Automation SCADA Specialist](#)

Jefferson Utilities

[Customer Accounts Clerk](#)

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When your utility is hiring, be sure to email the job posting to office@meuw.org.



Did you Know?

This year's summer season may seem a little longer than usual — at least on the calendar. With Memorial Day having marked the "unofficial" start of summer on May 25 and Labor Day landing

on its latest possible date, Sept. 7, the stretch between the two holidays in 2026 is the longest the calendar will allow. The date phenomenon gives us a total of 106 calendar days of traditional summer, compared to just 99 days in 2025. The result is a unique chance to enjoy an extended summer period.



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