TMEUW INC. INC. Volume 74, Issue 7 • July 2025

Access to emergency mutual aid: Valuable tool for utilities

By Mike Czuprynko

hen the worst happens, it's good to know you can rely on friends for support. That spirit is on full display any time an electric utility faces widespread outages in the wake of devastating storms. The concept of mutual aid is a hallmark of the electric industry. We've had more than our share of mutual aid events recently. In just the

last few months, utilities provided labor and equipment to restore power and keep people safe after a late March ice storm in Gresham and when tornadoes took aim at Juneau in mid-May.

As a statewide trade association focused on helping to unify and strengthen Wisconsin's public power utilities, MEUW takes an active role in coordinating mutual aid. MEUW members consistently rank emergency mutual aid among the greatest

value MEUW brings to their utility. MEUW staff members help to manage the response from neighboring utilities, organizing the right number of people with the right skills and equipment in the right locations at the right time.

As we've seen during the recent mutual aid events, a well-coordinated and organized response is essential to restoring storm-damaged systems and equipment safely and quickly.

MEUW leverages an established process each time a mutual aid event is requested. Which utilities are called and how many people are needed is based on the following considerations:

- The location of the damage;
- Other surrounding utilities that may also be in the path of the damaging storm or weather event; and
- The scope of the damage/how much help is needed.

Crew and equipment assistance is scheduled based on working to fill the need as quickly as possible, using the considerations listed above. For example, utilities in

the path of the weather event may be standing down to monitor their own systems, while others who are not at risk will be called first. Often, we receive more response than is needed based on the scope of the damage.

But even with a solid (and well-tested) mutual aid process, we've learned that some of our utilities have experienced challenges when working with the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA), including difficulty with reimbursement processes and timelines. These issues seem to most often result from turnover in the key contact (program manager) position and results in inefficiencies and delays.

At the national level, American Public Power Association (APPA) is working on several initiatives to help municipal utilities and FEMA work better together, including:

- Asking FEMA to standardize the process it uses to award assistance for utility projects, which currently varies from year-to-year and event-to-event. The initiative aims to:
 - Increase the accountability of FEMA program managers;

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Mutual aid crews strung a threephase feeder after multiple poles had to be replaced when tornadoes hit Juneau in May.

Photo courtesy of Steve Brooks

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Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin's mission is to **strengthen and unify community-owned utilities**. Since 1928, MEUW has been the trade association for Wisconsin's 81 public power communities and is affiliated with the American Public Power Association (APPA) — www.publicpower.org

Wisconsinites recognized with national public power awards

he American Public Power Association (APPA) recently presented individuals and utilities with awards for their service to public power, including three from Wisconsin.



Jim Brooks of Evansville was awarded the Spence Vanderlinden Public

Official Award, which recognizes elected or appointed local officials who have contributed to the goals of APPA. Brooks has served on the Evansville City Council since 2010 and is Chair of Municipal Services Committee that

oversees the Evansville Light & Water Utility. Through the years, Brooks has been a regular attendee at federal legislative rallies, and in 2015 was elected to serve on American Public Power Association's Policy Makers Council, which he Chaired in 2022-23.



Troy Murphy of Prairie du Sac was presented with the Larry Ho-

bart Seven Hats Award. The award recognizes a manager who performs a variety of duties in communities with 2,500 or fewer electric meters and wears many "hats." These managers have a very small staff and must assume multiple roles. Murphy began his career with the Village in 1997 as an apprentice line technician. Murphy accepted his current role as Director Public Works in 2016. The utility has made significant system upgrades to improve reliability under his leadership.

Marshfield Utilities (MU) was presented with the Sue Kelly Community Service Award to honor its "good neighbor" activities that demonstrate commitment to the local community. In

2024, MU celebrated 120 years of serving the community with its ComMUnity Care Project, with a goal of MARSHFIELD C giving back to local communities in 120 different ways. The award also recognized MU employees' active participation in community fundraising, including donating backpacks and professional attire, and making financial contributions to support local groups. MU was one of only five utilities to receive this honor.

The awards were presented during the annual APPA National Conference held in New Orleans in June. •

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- Develop a standardized Public Assistance (PA) Program checklist; and
- Increase FEMA's engagement with utilities.
- Requesting that the FEMA disaster assistance process account for the unique nature of public power's emergency responsibility role following major incidents by:
 - Streamlining or waiving some date requirements for emergency work;
 - Expediting assistance for utilities facing multiple disasters;
 - Creating a new PA "Category for Work" for utility emergency restoration.
- Requesting that FEMA train program managers on electric utility-specific issues to address a perceived lack of institutional knowledge and experience.

As APPA is working on these issues, utilities are encouraged to document all conversations and exchanges through email. This provides concrete evidence to help expedite the process in the event of a new program manager. Take photos, upload everything, and save all sent emails to help ensure reimbursement. •



Mike Czuprynko is Director of Safety Services and Operations for MEUW. One call to the MEUW **Mutual Aid Hotline** — 1-844-MEUW-911 — triggers an immediate response to organize resources and support a member utility's recovery.

Future of FEMA in question

FEMA was established in 1979 to consolidate various federal disaster-related responsibilities into a single agency. Initially operated as an independent agency, FEMA was later integrated into the Department of Homeland Security in 2003. The Trump Administration is contemplating a phase-out of FEMA following the 2025 hurricane season. The change would put responsibility on impacted states to fund natural disasters they encounter.

It's not clear what impact this would have on Wisconsin and other states that MEUW member utilities support for mutual aid. Some are speculating that funding may happen faster, while others predict states will be more reluctant to call on states that are further away. Crews from responding states may also be more hesitant to travel because of open questions about how or when they will be paid. Many uncertainties exist.

In the meantime, APPA is working with FEMA to strengthen their operations and processes to help with recovery for utilities impacted by natural disasters. MEUW is closely monitoring these decisions and will share updates as they become available.





PSC decides on individual metering exemptions

At its June 19 open meeting, the three-person Public Service Commission (PSC) reached agreement on proposed revisions to individual electric metering requirements for multi-dwelling residential buildings. Originally established in 1980 (and last reviewed in 2002), the current rule requires individual meters for most apartment units to promote energy conservation and ensure tenants pay only for their own electricity usage. The rulemaking was initiated in 2023 due to an increasing number of waiver requests and the need for clearer guidance to align with current technology and energy use considerations for this type of housing. MEUW has been carefully following the docket and provided a comprehensive assessment of the potential revisions in the March 2025 Live Lines.

After discussion, the commissioners agreed to replace the current waiver process and instead apply exemptions to individual metering by requiring that electric equipment under tenant control comply with established high-energy-efficiency standards. Likewise, an exemption would be allowed when the average electric energy use in each multidwelling unit is projected to be less than half of Wisconsin's average per-customer monthly residential use. Onsite renewable energy technologies offsetting overall usage would be factored into the projections.

The commissioners also agreed to exemptions involving new construction in which building design meets high-energy-efficiency standards and for multi-dwelling unit residential buildings under contract with local, state, or federal affordablehousing programs. The final language revising Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 113.0803 will be reviewed by the Commissioners before being forwarded to the Governor and legislature.

FERC's limited authority over public power affirmed

A federal appellate court recently upheld a Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) decision denying Kimball Wind, LLC's request for the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) to reimburse \$6 million in interconnection costs. The court affirmed that FERC's authority under section 211A of the Federal Power Act does not extend to ordering non-jurisdictional utilities, like public power entities, to pay such costs.

Kimball Wind sought reimbursement after upgrading a wind facility and connecting to WAPA's system. FERC denied the request, as Kimball Wind wasn't a transmission customer of

Members' NEWS



Jill Weiss is joining Sun Prairie Utilities as General Manager July 21. She has been Utilities Director at Stoughton Utilities since 2019, and is a member of the Board of Directors of both MEUW and WPPI Energy.

Braeden Minor has joined Hustisford Utilities as an Apprentice Lineworker.

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.

Three begin service on MEUW Accounting and Customer Service Committee

Organizations are made up of people who give their time and talent to support the greater good. MEUW benefits from the volunteer leadership of many members who serve on standing committees of the Board of Directors. Three individuals have recently joined the Accounting and Customer Service Committee, succeeding long-time members who recently retired. The new members are: Shanon Breed, Finance/ Office Manager at Rice Lake Utilities; Kristin Hubertus, Finance Manager at Menasha Utilities, and Tiffany Myers, Accounting and Customer Service Manager at Manitowoc Public Utilities. Each of them will now put their municipal utility experience to work and help structure MEUW programming for accounting, credit and col-

Notes from recent committee meetings and a complete listing of those who serve on standing committees are available on MEUW's website at www.meuw.org/committees.

lections, and customer service employees.





Hubertus



Myers

WAPA and wasn't seeking transmission service. The court ruled that section 211A only allows FERC to order transmission service on comparable terms — not cost reimbursement.

This decision reinforces the limited scope of FERC's authority over public power utilities and preserves their exemption from FERC's general ratemaking jurisdiction.



TMEUW NEWS Monitor

Register for Leading Through Collaboration

Collaborating isn't just about working with people — it also involves using influence and persuasion to drive high-performing teams. Leaders skilled in collaboration understand how individuals impact one another and how to foster creative thinking and effective problemsolving to drive results. Leading Through Collaboration, part of MEUW's three-part Municipal Utility Leadership Certificate series, will give attendees practical ideas and skills to apply at their work-place. The class will be held Mauston on Wednesday, Aug. 6. Full details are here.

Annual Accounting and Customer Service Seminar is Sept. 24 in Mauston

Registration will open soon for 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 legislative policies affecting utilities to 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 Sept. 24 in Mauston.

lic power. Make plans for you and your Commissioners or Board Members to attend one of the eight dinners scheduled to receive updates and participate in roundtable discussions.

Planned locations and dates are:

- Tuesday, Sept. 23 Hartford
- Wednesday, Sept. 24 Rice Lake
- Monday, Sept. 29 Algoma
- Tuesday, Sept. 30 Gresham
- Monday, Oct. 6 Cuba City
- Wednesday, Oct. 8 Cashton
- Thursday, Oct. 9 Merrillan
- Wednesday, Oct. 15 Mazomanie

Advance registration will be required. Full details about specific locations and sign-up information will be shared in future communications from MEUW.

Each session begins with a cash bar at 6:00 p.m., meal at 6:30 p.m., and a brief program to follow. The events typically wrap up no later than 8:00 p.m.



Mark your calendars for MEUW District Dinners

MEUW will once again be hosting District Dinners around the state in September and October to provide local utility leaders a chance to connect and network over topics of interest to pub-



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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

Your voice matters: Why advocacy is everyone's business

f you've ever wondered whether your voice matters in government, the answer is a resounding yes! Whether you're an elected official or a utility staff person, your insight plays a vital role in shaping policy that impacts the electric-utility industry and municipal utilities across Wisconsin.

In support of MEUW's Strategic Plan objectives, members of the Board of Directors' Advocacy Training Work Group sat down with several attendees at the 2025 Annual Conference to hear why advocacy matters, what motivates them to engage, and how they've built relationships with their legislators over time. Here's a snapshot of what we heard:

Advocacy is local leadership



"Advocacy is important because you're the voice for the entire community and your utility," explained **Brian Rhodes**, General Manager of Hartford Utilities. "You have the opportunity to explain to legislators how important certain issues are in your area."

With over 1,000 bills introduced each session, many directly affect cities and villages. Whether your role covers a broad range of issues or a specific area, your knowledge and local perspective help legislators understand how laws affect real communities.

It's not about being an expert — It's about telling your story



Most legislators aren't experts in every issue they vote on — that's where you come in. Sharing your local experience helps lawmakers understand real-world consequences of policy decisions. "It's our job to help them understand our needs and challenges," said **Dan Hornung**, a long-time public power advocate and Manitowoc Public Utilities Commissioner.

Advocacy efforts can be one-time or ongoing. You might respond to a specific bill, testify at a hearing, or meet with your legislator. You may also contribute feedback to MEUW or APPA or respond to surveys on issues. The best engagement includes personal stories and local examples that illustrate the real-world impact of legislation.

It's never too early to build relationships



The best time to connect with your elected officials is before you need something. "Keep sharing your story — even when there isn't a fire to put out," suggested **Troy Adams**, General Manager at Manitowoc Public Utilities. "When the time comes, you'll already have that relationship in place."

Build relationships with your legislators now by attending listening sessions, inviting them to visit your municipality, or meeting informally.

These are just a few voices helping MEUW shape a stronger future for public power. In the months ahead, we'll highlight more member experiences — from first-time advocates to seasoned pros — and share simple, actionable ways you can get involved.

Want to Add Your Voice?

We're building a library of stories and tools to support local advocacy efforts. If you've got an experience, idea, or tip to share, we want to hear it! Please take a moment to <u>answer a few brief questions</u> to let us know what you are doing. ●

Questions? Contact MEUW Director of Legislative and Regulatory Relations **Tyler Vorpagel** at (920) 265-7720 or by email at tvorpagel@meuw.org



Get to know a little about some Wisconsin lawmakers



This regular feature helps readers get to know Wisconsin elected officials and better understand their views on policies that may impact municipal utilities.

Veteran lawmaker now represents 15th District



Adam Neylon (R-Pewaukee) has served as the representtative for Wisconsin's 15th Assembly Dis-

trict since January 2025, after representing the 98th District from 2013 to 2025. The 15th District, located in southeastern Wisconsin, includes Pewaukee, most of Brookfield, and parts of the City of Waukesha in Waukesha County.

Neylon currently serves on the Assembly's Energy and Utilities Committee, a role he has held since the 2023–24 legislative session. He is also Chair of the Assembly Committee on the Review of Administrative Rules and Co-Chair of the Joint Committee for Review of Administrative Rules. In addition, he is a member of the

Assembly committees on Jobs, Economy and Small Business Development; Health, Aging and Long-Term Care; and Public Benefit Reform.

Originally from the Chicago area, Neylon moved to Wisconsin to attend Carroll University in Waukesha. He earned a bachelor's degree in political science in 2008. Before his election to the Assembly, he worked on Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner's campaign and later served on his staff. He also held roles with the Republican National Committee and the Wisconsin GOP and worked as a policy advisor in the state legislature.

Alongside his public service, Neylon is a small business owner. In 2010, he founded the Neylon Group, LLC, a commercial window-cleaning company based in Waukesha.

His legislative work has earned recognition from the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, and the American Conservative Union.

He lives in Pewaukee with his wife and their three children and remains active in the community, including coaching youth sports and serving on the Carroll University President's Advisory Council.

Rep. Sarah Keyeski is newly elected legislator



Sarah Keyeski (D-Lodi) has represented Wisconsin's 14th State Senate District since

January 2025. Located in central Wisconsin, the district includes all of Richland and Sauk counties, most of Columbia County, and parts of southern Adams and Juneau counties, as well as northern Dane County. Key communities in the district include Baraboo, Columbus, Portage, Reedsburg, Richland Center, and Wisconsin Dells.

A lifelong Wisconsinite, Keyeski was born in La Crosse and raised on her family's farm near Cashton in Monroe County. She earned her bachelor's degree from Luther College in Iowa in 1993 and a master's degree in counseling from Northwestern University in 1996. She became a Licensed Professional Counselor and spent more than a decade practicing in Sun Prairie before relocating to Lodi, where she opened her own private counseling practice.

Keyeski's commitment to mental health advocacy deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic, when she witnessed first-hand the strain it placed on her community. In response, she founded Lift Lodi, a nonprofit organization focused on improving public spaces and promoting civic engagement through volunteerism.

In 2024, following significant redistricting changes, Keyeski launched a campaign for the Wisconsin State Senate. She went on to win one of the most closely watched races in the state, narrowly defeating incumbent Joan Ballweg with just over 51% of the vote.

As a senator, Keyeski serves on several committees, including Agriculture and Revenue; Education; and Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families. She is a vocal advocate for expanding mental health services, improving educational access, and investing in Wisconsin's rural communities.

Keyeski lives in Lodi with her husband, Rodney, and their six children. ●





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Kaukauna paper mill honored for excellence in energy efficiency

hlstrom-Thilmany Mill in Kaukauna has been honored with the prestigious 2025 Energy Efficiency Excellence Award from Focus on Energy, in partnership with Kaukauna Utilities. The award recognizes the mill's outstanding efforts in implementing sustainable energy solutions that not only reduce operational costs but also contribute to a healthier environment and a stronger economy.

Ahlstrom-Thilmany Mill manufactures a wide range of specialty paper products, including food packaging, e-commerce packaging, building and construction papers, and medical papers. The mill, founded in 1883 by Oscar Thilmany, was purchased by Finnish-based manufacturer Ahlstrom in 2018. Recently, Ahlstrom invested in upgrading and converting a paper machine at the Kaukauna plant to produce stretchable crepedbase papers for masking tape. This new crepe machine is unique because it enables the use of integrated pulp from the Thilmany pulp mill, generating sustainability advantages such as reduced emissions from lower energy consumption and less transportation, along with cost benefits for customers.

In recent years, the mill has made significant facility upgrades, implementing energy-efficient improvements to lighting, process equipment, compressed air systems, and HVAC systems. The upgrades and other measures have led to estimated energy reduction totals of 1300 kW; 14,213,138 annual kWh; 2,496,862 annual therms; and 4,418,113 MMBTU.

The mill has received over \$1.2 million in Focus on Energy incentives for its upgrades. In addition to participating in the Focus on Energy program through Kaukauna Utilities, the Ahlstrom-Thilmany plant has also participated in the WPPI Energy Request for Proposals (RFP) Program for the last 16 years.

Kaukauna Utilities General Manager Michael Avanzi said, "We believe in partnering with our customers to use energy efficiently and sustainably. Over the years, no customer has exemplified this better than Ahlstrom's Thilmany Mill. We are proud to be their electric service provider and community partner and applaud them for this remarkable achievement."

The mill's achievements in energy efficiency have a ripple effect on the local community. By reducing energy consumption and operational costs, Ahlstrom-Thilmany Mill enhances its own sustainability while also supporting the economic vitality of Kaukauna.



Those celebrating the Ahlstrom-Thilmany Mill's 2025 Energy Efficiency Excellence Award were (from left): WPPI Energy Energy Services Manager Frank Barth; Kaukauna Mayor Tony Penterman; Kaukauna Utilities General Manager Michael Avanzi; Ahlstrom Thilmany Plant Manager Chris Williams; Thilmany Plant Maintenance and Engineering Manager Richard Peterson; Ahlstrom Thilmany Project Engineer-Energy David Leeder; Focus on Energy Energy Advisor Tim Hasbargen; Public Service Commissioner Marcus Hawkins; and Focus on Energy Managing Director Erin Soman.

Ahlstrom-Thilmany Mill was among 11 Wisconsin organizations recognized for their exceptional contributions to energy efficiency.

Celebrating these achievements acknowledges the vital role that energy efficiency plays in building resilient communities and fostering economic growth. Across Wisconsin, municipal utilities are working with customers to successfully embrace energyefficient practices. Ahlstrom-Thilmany Mill's journey serves as a strong example of what can be achieved through dedication, innovation, and collaboration.





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Municipal employees complete MEUW training program

Three MEUW utility employees recently took the next step in their professional development journeys. Pictured at right are: **Natalie Markelz** (Menasha Utilities), **Ashley Fox** and **Amanda Trumpf** (both of Sun Prairie Utilities) who were recognized during a recent training session held in Mauston.

Each of them has now completed MEUW's four-part Fundamentals of Municipal Utility training program. The series is designed to explain specifics that are relevant to public power utility employees and leaders, with an emphasis on detailing the "why" behind each of the discussion areas. Municipal workers of all skill levels and



backgrounds can benefit from this series, providing them with a foundation for understanding the public power industry. To learn more about professional development opportunities, visit *meuw.org/pdp*.

LIVELines Classifieds

MEUW is pleased to promote job openings with its member utilities across Wisconsin. New positions are regularly added to our website — check them out here or use your smartphone to scan the QR code below. Here are some current opportunities available:

City of Stoughton

Utilities Director

City of New Lisbon

Director of Public Works

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



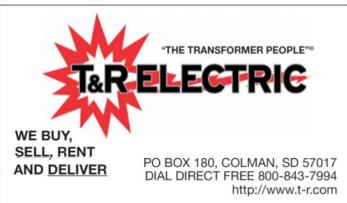
Provider Review Panel with preference to members from an APPA region that includes Wisconsin, and those who have not yet served on the Panel. Nominations are due July 14.

American Public Power Association (APPA) is seeking nomi-

The Smart Energy Provider (SEP) program is public power's evaluation and review of leading practices for utilities based on four criteria — smart energy program planning, energy efficiency and distributed energy resources, environmental and sustainability programs, and customer communication and education. The SEP Review Panel guides APPA staff in the implementation of the SEP program and provides expert peer review of public power utilities' applications for SEP recognition.

For further information on position requirements and recommended criteria, please view the <u>nomination form</u>. Please reach out to APPA at *SEP@publicpower.org* with questions.













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