



Early Morning Power Outage

On Thursday, March 13, 2008, there was a power outage at 5:04 A.M. caused by a fire on an Xcel Energy transmission pole on Ebersole Ave. The power outage affected Delano, Rockford, Montrose, Waverly, and Howard Lake. Power was restored for most of this area at 6:26 A.M. As of 7:45 A.M., parts of Rockford, Montrose, Waverly, and Howard Lake were still without power. The system was unable to auto-switch to our backup transmission lines due to the construction on the Hwy 12 transmission system. DMU crews were in the process of bringing generators online, when Xcel called and informed us that they had restored power to the open switch on Co. Rd. 30. We put generation on hold and dispatched a crew to throw that switch. Xcel requested that we also throw the switch in our substation to back feed their customers beyond the fault. We regret the inconvenience caused to our customers by this outage. We try to restore service, whether on our system, or in this case Xcel's transmission line, as quickly as possible.



“They Can’t Turn My Power Off In Winter”

The truth about the cold weather rule

Major utilities across the region have reported millions of dollars in uncollectible electric bills for the winter months. Who pays the bill? The good customers, for years, have been indirectly paying these bills through higher electric rates or we all get to pay for them through taxes. Several years ago, Minnesota enacted the Cold Weather Rule. This rule protects utility customers from unexpected disconnects during the winter months, October 15th through April 15th. The key word in that sentence is ‘unexpected.’

There are many reasons a utility bill doesn’t get paid, but they can be divided into 3 basic categories. First, the utility bill was never received. Second, no money, can’t afford to pay the utility bill. Third, irresponsible customers with no intention of paying their utility bill. I know that sounds harsh but it’s true. For example, our customer Herman Munster. Herman went to Las Vegas for a two week vacation. Upon returning home, Herman misplaced his utility bill. About a week later he receives another letter from the utility explaining that his account is delinquent and he needs to pay or be disconnected. Now Herman is embarrassed and maybe somewhat offended at the wording of this letter, having never been late in all the years he has been a customer. During the summer this letter is a courtesy, during the winter it is required by the cold weather rule. Also required by “The Rule” as well as state statute and utility policy, is the wording of this letter. We print approximately 400 of these reminder notices each month, which is approximately six percent of our customers. Now, I know many of our customers have lived in Delano for many years. We have generations of families who have been our customers. The computer, however, doesn’t know that. It just prints out delinquent reminders on accounts without regard to who the customer is.

Our second reason is the customer can’t afford to pay the bill. This brings in the cold weather rule in full force. Included with the delinquent notice is a brochure that explains how to get assistance to pay your bill. It is really all about communication. Call the utility at 972-0557. We are easy to work with before the power goes out. A rough estimate of how much a residential disconnection costs the utility is about \$150.00 starting with the first of four reviews of the account, the disconnection and finally the reconnection of power. Once the power is disconnected we have to follow very strict guidelines

Third, I know that it is hard to believe that there are people out there who move into a place, set up an account, and have no intention of ever paying a bill. They move from place to place hoping to have electricity as long as they can, and not fully understanding the cold weather rule. This is the major reason the utility has a service deposit on all rental accounts and a strict disconnect policy. That service deposit protects all utility customers. If we didn’t disconnect or have service deposits, there could be a loss of thousands of dollars from uncollected accounts. The cost would have to be passed to our other customers. We are a municipal utility and must account to our customers and their appointed Commission for every penny.

The cold weather rule permits us to disconnect after all required notifications have been made. The cold weather rule protects more than the customer who has run into a streak of bad luck. It protects all the customers of Delano and the utility itself. For more information on the cold weather rule you can visit the Public Utilities Commission Website at <http://www.puc.state.mn.us/consumer/assist/coldrule.htm>