

LIVELines

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Attendees Get Questions Answered at Accounting and Customer Service Seminar

The 2015 Accounting and Customer Service Seminar was held Sept. 23 in Wisconsin Dells and was very well attended with 109 in attendance representing 62 communities. There were many hot topics on the agenda this year that updated utility personnel on regulatory and legislative issues impacting their utilities.

The Department of Revenue (DOR) has worked very hard to improve collection efficiencies through both expanded legislative authority and new technology. Presenters Joseph Mugenga and Rick Karls from the DOR shared these efficiencies regarding the State Debt Collection program hoping to help enhance current collections operations for municipal utilities. As a municipal utility, you can partner with the DOR to improve the efficiency of collection of your outstanding debt.

Jodi Dobson from Baker Tilly highlighted some of the changes that utilities will see in the annual report to the Public Service Commission (PSC) this year. In addition, she discussed best practices in sharing financial information with a governing body including types of communications as well as how to assess if the information is providing value.

In preparation for this year's PSC report there is some new information that will be required and now is the time to think about how that will be gathered. Attendees were reminded that there is no one-size-fits-all in reporting to a governing body - the information desired, level of detail and level of explanation all change with changes in the governing body. The key to ensuring that the members have the information they need to govern is to ask.

Lawrie Kobza reviewed Act 274 provisions with attendees and discussed the new tax roll and tenant lien requirements and the challenges that utilities may face in complying with these new requirements. Act 274 did not change the ability of municipal utilities to place delinquent utility bills on the property tax rolls, but did add some requirements for certain properties and customers where the landlord has triggered the application of additional landlord/tenant requirements.

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Accounting and Customer Service Seminar *continued...*



Presenter Jodi Dobson reviews best practices in sharing financial information with a governing body.

It is important that utilities are knowledgeable on Act 274. MEUW, Wisconsin Rural Water Association, Municipal Environmental Group - Water, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities and the Wisconsin Section of AWWA have prepared several documents that provide complete guidance on how to comply with the tax roll provisions of Act 274. They can be found under the resource center on MEUW's website.

Presenter Scott Munn took attendees through the importance of eliminating bad debt. He showed the value of a risk-based deposit policy for municipal utilities and discussed ID validation and the collection of bad debt. By gaining as much information about your service applicants as you can, you are able to provide a more equitable deposit system.

Presenter Kristy Nieto from the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin's Consumer Affairs Unit wrapped up the seminar with an overview of utility requirements for handling common customer service issues. Topics included 21-day medical extensions, requesting customer information on applications for service, identifying a responsible party for billing and transferring previous past-due balances to a customer's new account. Attendees had a chance to ask questions and get clarity on a number of issues.



As one of the largest MEUW Accounting Customer Service Seminars to date - the event had 109 utility staff in attendance.

A key take-away for attendees was the importance of maintaining billing and collection policies that are non-discriminatory and in compliance with relevant Wis. Admin. Code and statutory provisions. Utilities should contact the commission for clarification when faced with questions regarding utility customer service requirements.

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MEUW Safety Corner

By Chris Schlehta, MEUW Director of Safety Services

One area of safety that I haven't spent much time discussing in the past is keeping your employees and facilities safe from external security threats. Having a strong security posture for your utility is just as important as building a strong safety culture, and it's paramount to maintaining a highly reliable utility. When you start evaluating your security risks and how to mitigate them, you may find that there are several other operational objectives that can be served with the same solutions. Finding the business justification for increasing security measures becomes much easier when the security feature supports other operational areas of the utility. Security cameras for example, can be utilized to perform security functions as well as becoming an integral part of your preventative maintenance program. Technology from FLIR now makes it possible to purchase a single camera for a substation that can detect and alert operators of persons in or approaching the substation day or night, as well as conduct pinpoint thermography of components within the system and alert operators of any anomaly. With the improvement in technology, the prices on equipment like this have fallen significantly to be more affordable for nearly any size utility. These cameras aren't the single solution to an effective security program, nor are they my recommendation as a first priority to purchase when upgrading your systems, but they are one of many types of security solutions that offer dual operational benefits. I point these types of options out to illustrate that when you are looking to solve operational needs, many times the choice of the right solution can provide multiple dividends.

In the past several years, electric generation, transmission and distribution have seen increasing threats to the reliable operation of our systems. These threats manifest themselves in several ways ranging from disgruntled customers to the more sinister domestic and foreign terrorists. These threats may manifest themselves as more overt attacks such as the PG&E Metcalf substation or they may be attacks that are questionable in motive such as a number of smaller incidents in member communities over the past year that haven't made it to the news. Some of these incidents may have been nothing more than theft attempts or random vandalism; or in other incidents where the actors had enough knowledge or dumb luck to not kill themselves, they could have been conducted in an attempt to sabotage equipment or disrupt the operations of a specific customer or the utility. The size of your system doesn't make your utility any more or any less of a target. The threat of foreign terrorism isn't a distant threat either, keep in mind there have been a number of arrests in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois in just the past year of individuals for their activities in support of ISIS.

So where do you begin? You can invest millions of dollars in the latest high tech gadgetry, but it all starts with your employees. Your employees are your best security asset - they have tremendous knowledge about your systems and they know when something is out of place. It might be that they notice someone was tampering with a door or gate, or it may be that they've noticed people or vehicles in an area that they appear out of place. There's an old adage that says, "If it doesn't feel right...it probably isn't" and it couldn't be more true when talking about security. There has been a significant

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something
SAY
something™

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in or around the park?

Then **SAY** something to local law
enforcement to make it right.

Safety Corner *continued...*

effort put forth by state and federal law enforcement to promote the motto “If you see something...say something”. All too often we tend to discount incidents or behaviors, not realizing that they could in fact be part of a bigger picture and a more serious threat than we could anticipate. Imagine if the instructors at that flight school in Florida contacted law enforcement back in 2001 and mentioned that they had a bunch of students taking classes to pilot wide bodied passenger aircraft but didn't have any interest in learning how to land while using the simulators. Make an effort to ensure that all of your employees understand that if they see something out of the ordinary, to report it to law enforcement. Throughout the state and the nation the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) operates 77 Fusion Centers to collect, coordinate and disseminate information. When suspicious activity is observed please make sure that local law enforcement is filing a “Suspicious Activity Report” (SAR) through WILENet or by contacting me directly. This information is then vetted and may be forwarded out to various stakeholders as needed.

There are several new training products that are being made available to help train and educate your employees as part of this DHS initiative. Please watch for those in the coming months, as they will be distributed via member communications. If there is any way that I can be of assistance please don't hesitate to contact me at cschlechta@meuw.org.



JT&S Lineman Seminar

Registration Open!

The JT&S Lineman Seminar will be held Nov. 10-11 in Wisconsin Dells. Trade experts will provide information on areas that linemen deal with on a daily basis. The decisions linemen make during the course of the work day impacts various aspects of the utility's operations efficiency, safety and reliability.

Participants attending this workshop will:

- Review updated information on AR(FR) clothing requirements, as well as the basics of the clothing
- Receive information on the “ins and outs” of the transmission system that provides utilities with power
- Learn how to deal with problem dogs and dogs in general when confronted
- Discuss how to interact with customers, attitudes and the benefits of working at a utility
- Take a look at problems when communication between crew members fail

Bryan Singletary joins us as an instructor at this seminar. Bryan has been involved with a number of MEUW events in the past including serving as keynote speaker for the Joint Superintendent's conference in 2014. With 35 years experience in the electric utility industry, he has consulted with hundreds of utilities in the design, development and implementation of a wide range of customer programs. Bryan owns and operates Practical Energies, a utility consulting firm specializing in assisting cooperatives in preparing for meeting the needs of their members.

Whether you are a new manager or a seasoned superintendent/lineman, you don't want to miss this relevant and informative Seminar! [Click here](#) for registration materials and more information.



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Coming Events

Oct. 4-10	Public Power Week Download marketing materials.
Oct. 7	MEUW Management Training Program: Session C, Wisconsin Dells
Oct. 13-14	MEUW JT&S Substation Workshop, Kaukauna - Register today!
Oct. 16	Customers First! POWER Breakfast, Madison - Register today!
Nov. 10-11	MEUW JT&S Lineman Seminar Wisconsin Dells - Register today!
Dec. 8-9	Save the date! MEUW JT&S Overhead/ Underground Design Seminar, Eau Claire
Jan. 27-29	Save the date! MEUW WI/REC Joint Superintendent's Conference, Wisconsin Dells

Mark Your Calendars! Visit the MEUW [website](#) for a full list of events scheduled through summer of 2016.

Baker Tilly — Utility University

October 20 | 8:00am – 4:00pm

Location: Kalahari Resort, Wisconsin Dells

Individual cost = \$75; Two or more attendees = \$60

Join Baker Tilly for an educational workshop designed to share knowledge that will enhance the day-to-day financial operations of your utility. Topics will include:

- Governmental accounting update
- Succession planning
- IT security
- Community Power 101: Tending the Solar Garden and other Distributed Energy Adventures
- Communicating with your governing body
- Cash reserve policies
- Wisconsin Public Service Commission Annual Report

Financial staff of Wisconsin municipal utilities and utility managers are encouraged to attend.

The DNR has approved this training for operator certification continuing education credits (CECs).

[Learn more and register today.](#)

APPA Academy Webinar Series



An internet connection and a computer are all you need to educate your entire staff for just \$89. Register today at [APPAAcademy.org](#). Non-APPA members enter coupon code **MEUW** to receive the member rate.

- Accounting and Finance Webinar Series:
Performing a Utility Financial Checkup **Oct. 1**
- Cybersecurity Webinar Series:
Building a Foundation for the Protected Utility **Oct. 15**
- Public Utility Governance Webinar Series:
Achieving Excellence in Public Power
Governance **Oct. 22**
- Cybersecurity Webinar Series:
Improving Cybersecurity Posture:
Public Power Case Studies **Nov. 4**



Customers First! POWER Breakfast - Friday, Oct. 16

EPA's CLEAN POWER PLAN

The POWER Breakfast will be held Oct. 16 from 8 a.m. to noon at the Madison Concourse Hotel.

In August, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) adopted carbon pollution standards for existing power plants, known as the Clean Power Plan. Join us to hear from state Public Service Commission chairperson Ellen Nowak, EPA regional administrator Susan Hedman and representatives from Wisconsin energy providers, consumer and environmental groups as they discuss the Plan and its implications for Wisconsin. This event is free, [register online.](#)

Member News & Tidbits

ATTENTION! PSC Remainder Assessments

Please carefully review your PSC remainder assessment invoices that were issued. A few MEUW members have brought it to our attention that invoices were calculated on Total Operating Revenue (Annual Report page F-4, line 1) instead of Revenues Subject to Wisconsin Remainder Assessment (page F-4, line 7).

Act 274 Tax Roll Guidance Update

In May 2015 MEUW sent members several documents that provided guidance on how to comply with the tax roll provisions of Act 274. Since providing those documents several utilities have raised concerns related to the statutory requirement under Act 274 related to the transfer of the lien on the tenant's assets to the landlord upon the landlord's payment of the tenant's delinquent utility bills. The working group has revised the Act 274 Tax Roll Guidance PDF and related forms to reflect the updated interpretation of the lien transfer provision. The revised Tax Roll Guidance and related forms replace the prior versions and are available under the resource center on MEUW's [website](#).

Fall 2015 Municipal Electric Utility Reporting Requirements

[Click here](#) for a list outlining the various reports required with the applicable due dates and contacts.

MEUW Mutual Aid Manual Update

MEUW is in the process of updating the Mutual Aid Manual. In order to provide the most current information, please complete the online [MEUW Mutual Aid Manual Update survey](#). Please submit responses via the online survey no later than Friday, Oct. 9, 2015.

MEUW Job Training & Safety Schedule Update

The JT&S training schedule through December 2015 is available on the MEUW website. For the schedule, overview of upcoming sessions and session agendas [click here](#).

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Send your member news and tidbits to Rachel Stephenson at rstephenson@meuw.org.



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Waunakee Utilities is accepting applications for a water/sewer operator. This position will be involved in the operation, maintenance and repair of the utility water and sewer system. The position will remain open until filled; first review of applications will begin October 15. [Click here](#) for a complete job description and application details.

The city of Fennimore, seeks to fill a full-time electric lineworker position. The individual hired will work as part of a three-person team responsible for day-to-day operation, maintenance and repair of the municipal electric system. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. [Click here](#) for a complete job description and application details.

Manitowoc Public Utilities (MPU) is seeking applications for the position of environmental engineer. This full-time position provides professional engineering services to ensure regulatory compliant electric and water utility operations and maintenance. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. [Click here](#) for a complete job description and application details.

Waterloo Utilities is seeking qualified individuals for the position of utility accountant. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. [Click here](#) for a complete job description and application details.

Send your employment opportunities to Rachel Stephenson at rstephenson@meuw.org.



Public Power Week, Oct. 4-10

October 2015 will mark Public Power Week's 29th anniversary as a nationwide program to celebrate the importance of public power to local citizens, including state and national officials. Public Power Week will be held October 4-10; head to www.PublicPower.org to download free Public Power Week promotional materials you can use including logos, social media posts and graphics, blog and press release templates, and more.

Tell MEUW how your utility is celebrating Public Power Week - email your photos and events to rstephenson@meuw.org to be featured in next month's newsletter!

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