MEUW Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin

Live Lines

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Registration now open for January conference, trade show

Employees from Wisconsin's municipal and cooperative electric utilities will have the opportunity to learn and network at the upcoming annual Electric Operations Conference & Expo (EOCE). This year's event is set for Jan. 13 and 14, 2027, at the Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells. The agenda includes a variety of dynamic speakers exploring topics essential to the successful operation of municipal and cooperative utilities.

MEUW will hold a Board of Directors meeting at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 13. The Conference will begin at 1:00 p.m., with general session presentations and a keynote leadership presentation for both MEUW and co-op attendees. A Welcome Reception follows at 5:00 p.m.

The program for Thursday, Jan. 14 includes general sessions, facilitated topical cohort discussions, and an inspirational keynote presentation. Events will conclude with the annual banquet that will honor graduating apprentices in line work and electric metering.

In response to continued member feedback, the Expo will again be open for five hours, allowing exhibitors ample time to interact with attendees. The trade show will run from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Attendees will have the option to visit the Expo Hall or attend concurrent general and cohort sessions.

There are three different options for registration passes —Kilowatt, Megawatt, and Gigawatt. The Gigawatt pass provides access to all sessions on both days, the Welcome Reception, the Expo, and meals (except for the Apprentice Graduation Banquet, which requires a separate registration). Those most interested in the trade show, for example, can opt to purchase a Megawatt pass, which offers access to the Wednesday Welcome Reception and Thursday's conference sessions, meals, and the Expo.

New this year is a Special Expo Pass for graduating apprentices who register for the banquet. MEUW members who register by Friday, Nov. 20, will only pay $365 for the Gigawatt pass or $235 for the Megawatt pass. There are also special rates for retired public power employees who wish to attend to reconnect with former colleagues and keep up with what's happening in the electric utility industry.

Wednesday's general sessions will feature a presentation by Kate Christensen, Administrator of the Division of Energy Regulation and Analysis at the state's Public Service Commission (PSC). She will provide an update on regulatory matters, including a report on PSC actions related to data centers.

A representative from the Focus on Energy will share an update on the 2027-2030 energy-efficiency plan. A panel featuring representatives of several larger customers will offer their perspectives on working effectively with municipal and co-op utilities. The day will wrap up with Dana Zurbuchen, who will share her thoughts on how everyday actions shape teams, safety, and personal well-being.

Thursday's program begins with a presentation from Dr. Dave Schroeder, Director of National Security Initiatives at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He will highlight efforts to defend the electric grid against emerging cyber and physical threats. Other presentations will highlight insights for investing in distribution grid resiliency, a discussion about how long-range cash flow planning and rate-setting go hand-in-hand. There will also be a presentation about wildfire mitigation, including steps utilities can take to prepare and abide by local laws.

After lunch there will be a panel discussion about mutual aid and lessons all utilities can learn to prepare for mass-outage events. There will also be an overview of the post-election political climate in Wisconsin and a preview of utility industry policies that may be on the agenda for the new legislature.

Expo Bingo will also be back in 2027, giving attendees the chance to win a wide variety of exhibitor-donated door prizes.

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Algoma Utilities uses "High School Bill Quiz" to engage and equip future electric customers



Algoma High School students pose following a recent youth outreach session showcasing the municipal utility, explaining bills and finances, and highlighting potential career options.

What if a utility bill could become a classroom lesson — and a way to build lasting community support for public power?

When scholarship applications began dwindling, Algoma Utilities rethought its approach to youth outreach. The result: an interactive high school bill quiz that teaches students practical financial skills while introducing them to the people, services, and career opportunities behind their local utility.

"We're really proud of the work the utility does and always want to be involved in the community," said Sara Krouse, Office Manager at Algoma Utilities, who helped develop the program. "When I saw a lackluster response to the scholarship program, I was thinking about how we could make this more relevant."



The result is a high school bill quiz that combines practical financial education with an introduction to the people and services behind the community's electric utility. Twice a year, utility representatives visit a high school personal finance class. A 15-minute presentation explains how to read and pay a utility bill, followed by a three-page, open-resource quiz. Students can work together, ask questions, and consult the materials. Those who complete the exercise receive a $50 gift card.

Making utilities relevant

The presentation begins with everyday expenses students may encounter as adults, from rent and insurance to food, transportation, and utilities. Students learn about different utility services and basic energy concepts, including watts, kilowatts, and kilowatt-hours.

The discussion also introduces the range of careers available in the utility industry, including accounting, customer service, line work, water operations, engineering, and energy analysis. Students interested in learning more can explore utility tours and job-shadowing opportunities.

For Krouse, the program is about more than teaching students to understand a bill. It is also an investment in the utility's future relationship with the community.

"Before I started with the utility, I didn't really know how to read my bill," she said.

That experience helped shape her approach. She remembers what it was like before becoming familiar with the industry and understands how confusing energy bills can be for everyday customers.

She also hopes the program will help build community support for the utility over time. When future rate cases or major changes require public understanding and support, having residents who are familiar with the utility's work can make a difference.

"In five or 10 years, when we need the community to stand behind us, we need to start laying those tracks now," Krouse said.

Learning through a real bill

Using a sample statement, presenters walk students through account information, billing dates, usage history, payment deadlines, and late charges. They explain fixed customer charges, energy use, power-cost adjustments, taxes and assistance credits, showing how each component contributes to the final balance.

Students also learn about payment options and what can happen when bills go unpaid. The presentation covers Wisconsin's winter disconnection moratorium, the importance of contacting a utility early when payment becomes a challenge, and assistance resources such as the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program and weatherization services.

The program typically reaches 20 to 25 students per visit. And while utility bills might not sound like the most exciting classroom topic, Krouse has been pleasantly surprised by the students' engagement. "I remember thinking the first time we went in that they wouldn't want to listen and wouldn't understand," she said. "I'm always extremely impressed with the students and the questions they ask. The quizzes come back correct in almost all cases. We don't give them enough credit sometimes."

The lessons can also extend beyond the classroom. Students may return home and share what they learned with parents and grandparents, creating additional opportunities for families to better understand their utility bills.

A simple idea utilities can adapt

Algoma Utilities plans to continue the program because it offers a practical way to connect with young people and build awareness of the utility's role in the community.

"We think it's a great way to connect with youth in our community — our future billpayers," Krouse said.

Her advice to other utilities interested in similar outreach is to keep it simple, build relationships with local schools, and take advantage of opportunities to share the story with the broader community.

"Figure out the best person at the school. And steal the work we've done! Make it easy on yourself," she said. "The best approach is often the simplest one."

Krouse also encourages utility employees to bring their enthusiasm to the classroom. "Infuse your pride in your work and in your utility — people pick up on that and will see *you* as the authority and face of the utility."

Finally, she recommends promoting the effort through school newsletters, local newspapers, and chambers of commerce. These steps can help extend the program's reach and highlight the ways municipal utilities contribute to their communities.

By turning a declining scholarship effort into an interactive learning experience, Algoma Utilities has created a program that prepares students for adult financial responsibilities, introduces them to public power careers and begins building relationships that could benefit the utility for years to come.

Members' News

Rice Lake Utilities has hired **Brandon Shipley** as Journeyman Lineman. He previously worked for Barron Municipal Utility for three years.

Wendy Sutton is now Utility Clerk at Westby Electric & Water Utility.

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.



Municipal employees complete MEUW training program

Four MEUW utility employees recently took the next step in their professional development journeys. Pictured are (from left): **Nicole Renkas** (Columbus Utilities), **Matt Magnussen** (Oconomowoc Utilities), **Brandi Yungen** (Stoughton Utilities), and **Brian Hoops** (Stoughton 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*.

Collaboration takes JT&S training out of the classroom



Keeping safety training fresh, engaging, and effective has always been important. With a wide array of learning styles and differing experience levels in the ranks of municipal electric lineworkers, MEUW is exploring new approaches and partnering with member utilities as part of the Job Training and Safety (JT&S) program. The goal is to introduce new topics and more hands-on field training to encourage active participation and help lineworkers better retain and apply safe work practices.

One recent example was a partnership with Arcadia Electric Utility to host a hands-on mutual aid training exercise. On Oct. 14, MEUW facilitated a day of real-life scenarios for local crews in the rear-lot within Arcadia's electric grid. Arcadia also wanted to test a new mobile app called "Field Maps," which they plan to utilize in the event of a request for mutual aid.

Arcadia Electric Utility Superintendent Tim Putz said his goal was to expose his power plant workers and other employees to the workings of the electric utility so they would feel comfortable providing support during a large event.

As crews from neighboring utilities arrived for their regular JT&S training session, they were instructed to upload Arcadia's Geographic Information System (GIS) map to use during the day's events. Participants from Arcadia, Bangor, Trempealeau, Westby, and Whitehall then evaluated the application's functionality, ease of use, and accessibility of information to determine its effectiveness as a resource during mutual aid operations. Following the discussion and review of the GIS map, crews reviewed several safety rules that specifically related to the tasks they would perform.

In preparation for the one-day training event, Arcadia Electric Utility crews consulted with MEUW Electric Utility Safety and Training Coordinator Damian Pasch and created several realistic storm damage scenarios utilizing a retired rear-lot single-phase overhead line. The scenarios simulated downed primary and open-wire secondary lines, along with a variety of other hazards and challenges, including the removal of a rear-lot overhead transformer using a gin and rope blocks. Participating crews were reminded that during mutual aid responses, modern equipment and resources may not always be readily available, making it necessary to rely on traditional work methods and techniques to safely and effectively complete the task.

The variety of hands-on training exercises provided valuable learning opportunities for everyone involved, regardless of their time in the trade. Equally important was the opportunity for less-experienced linemen to learn from seasoned lineworkers, whose knowledge, experience, and practical expertise proved invaluable. Beyond the hands-on exercises, the event brought together crews from multiple utilities, encouraging collaboration, professional networking, and the exchange of proven work practices and techniques. These interactions are essential to the continued growth of the JT&S program and the professional development of municipal utility lineworkers across the state.

Similar exercises have already occurred and will continue at public power utilities in Argyle, Evansville, Hazel Green, Trempealeau, and Whitehall, among others. While this type of training takes time to organize, the lessons learned are vital to keeping workers safe and ensuring they receive field experience in a controlled environment. "Death by PowerPoint" is a legitimate concern for all workers and JT&S training is purposefully moving beyond the classroom to offer more engaging learning opportunities for lineworkers and other utility staff.

Live Lines

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 since 1961 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.

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Wisconsin utilities earn national recognition

Seventeen public power utilities from Wisconsin have earned a Smart Energy Provider (SEP) designation from the American Public Power Association for demonstrating commitment to and proficiency in energy efficiency, distributed energy resources, and environmental initiatives that support the goal of providing safe, reliable, low-cost, and sustainable electric service. The designations were presented during APPA's annual Customer Connections Conference in Nashville, Tenn., on Oct. 26.

The SEP designation, which lasts for three years (Dec. 1, 2026–Nov. 30, 2029), recognizes public power utilities for demonstrating leading practices in four key disciplines: smart energy information; energy efficiency and distributed energy resources programs; environmental and sustainability programs and initiatives; and communication, education, and customer experience. This is the ninth year APPA has offered the SEP designation.

The 17 MEUW member utilities earning the designation in 2026 are:

- Cedarburg Light and Water Commission
- Columbus Utilities
- Florence Utilities
- Jefferson Utilities
- Kaukauna Utilities
- Lake Mills Light & Water
- Menasha Utilities
- New London Utilities
- New Richmond Utilities
- Oconomowoc Utilities
- Oconto Falls Municipal Utilities
- Richland Center Electric Department
- River Falls Municipal Utilities
- Stoughton Utilities
- Sun Prairie Utilities
- Two Rivers Water & Light
- Waunakee Utilities

Seven member utilities previously earned SEP designation and will carry it through 2027:

- Algoma Utilities
- Eagle River Light & Water Utility
- Cuba City Light & Water
- Hartford Utilities
- Slinger Utilities
- Sturgeon Bay Utilities
- Waupun Utilities

In addition, Marshfield Utilities was recognized with a **2026 Public Power Customer Satisfaction Award** for providing excellent service to their community.

The award is based on receiving high customer marks in areas such as customer service, field personnel, communication, reliability, value, outage response, innovation, and overall satisfaction. Marshfield received bronze-level recognition and was the only Wisconsin utility to receive the award.

Wisconsin Rapids Water Works & Lighting Commission was selected to represent Wisconsin as a designee of APPA's inaugural public power utility **Cybersecurity Accelerator Program** (CAP). The new program helps public power utilities assess and improve the maturity of their cybersecurity programs, including the information technology and operational technology capabilities, governance practices, workforce preparation, incident response processes, and risk management activities that support reliable and resilient operations.

CAP is designed not only to recognize utilities that demonstrate strong cybersecurity practices, but also to help every participating utility better understand and communicate its current capabilities, identify opportunities for improvement, prioritize future investments, and measure progress over time.

Electric Operations Conference & Expo

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The day will be punctuated by a reminder of the power of personal perseverance and determination. Super Bowl Champion Don Beebee (pictured at right) will share his successes and struggles, and the importance of family values in achieving one's goals.



The Apprentice Graduation Banquet will take place Thursday evening and features a brief program to recognize the class of 2026, who completed the lineworker or meter technician programs at Chippewa Valley Technical College, and Northeast Wisconsin Technical College. There is a separate registration and $65 fee required to attend the Banquet.

MEUW celebrates its members and marks 98 years supporting public power in Wisconsin

We celebrated MEUW's 98th birthday by celebrating what really makes MEUW successful — our members! This year's Member Appreciation Days (Oct. 19 – 23) gave members a chance to participate in the fun through daily contests, treats, by providing feedback to MEUW, and a reminder to celebrate each other through nominations for MEUW Honors and Awards. We had more than 135 entries into the daily puzzles — as usual, our members really showed up!

MEUW's Member Appreciation Days is our way of saying "thank you." In today's fast-paced, ever-changing environment, the relationships built through association membership are more valuable than ever. Your commitment, ideas, and engagement are the foundation of everything we do.

As we gear up for our 100th anniversary in October 2028, our members' involvement helps shape our programs and services, drive innovation, and ensure that MEUW remains a trusted resource for the next 100 years.

The following members were randomly selected from among the correct respondents and will be awarded prizes:

Daily Contest Winners:

- Ryan Churchill – Reedsburg
- Jean Jack – Kaukauna
- Michelle Kaltenberg – Columbus
- Brenda Rundle – River Falls
- Bryce Schulke – Clintonville

The **"All In" award** was earned by Beth Rank (Oconto Falls), who was among eight members who completed every contest and also the Day 4 Bonus.

The "**Team Spirit" award** was awarded to Waupun Utilities, which had 33% of their employees submit answers during the daily contests!









Communities celebrate another Public Power Week

The first full week of October is the public power industry's annual opportunity to celebrate the benefits of being community-powered. Many MEUW member communities hosted special events and festivities, including:

- **Kaukauna Utilities** celebrated Public Power Week with two events. The utility hosted a Business Appreciation Brat Fry, serving 1,700 brats to 83 local businesses. They also sponsored a Public Power Week Coloring Contest, which drew participation from 32 classes at 10 area schools. The class or poster receiving the most Facebook "likes" won a pizza party and a $500 donation to their school. Because of the awesome participation, they decided to recognize two winning classes — one elementary school class and one middle school class!
- **Marshfield Utilities** sponsored several activities throughout the week, including a daily trivia contest on their social media accounts, Senior Bingo, and Public Power Story Time.
- **Rice Lake Utilities** celebrated Public Power Week with a week full of fun! Throughout the week, customers enjoyed promotional giveaways and sweet treats in the utility's lobby, along with the opportunity to enter a raffle for a chance to win $50 in "Chamber Bucks." The week's celebration wrapped up with two food trucks, treating customers to a complimentary lunch and dessert.
- **Stoughton Utilities**, **Two Rivers Utilities**, and **Waunakee Utilities** were among the utilities that posted videos on their Facebook pages showcasing the essential services municipal utilities provide to their communities.
- **Sun Prairie Utilities** participated in several events throughout the week. SPU sponsored and provided employee volunteers at Sunshine Supper, which provides free meals to those in need. SPU staff also participated in library reading time and a "touch a truck" event, and held a coloring contest. Employees even visited the winner's home and presented her with a plastic hard hat and stickers, along with a ride to school.

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PSC review of transmission projects should focus on cost impacts, reliability needs

By Tyler Vorpagel, Director of Legislative and Regulatory Relations

As non-profit, community-owned entities, Wisconsin's municipal electric utilities work every day to deliver reliable and affordable power to their customers. However, their ability to maintain competitive rates and reliable service is directly tied to decisions made regarding major regional infrastructure projects. Two proposed high-voltage transmission lines — Bell Center–Columbia–Sugar Creek–Illinois/Wisconsin State Line (BECI) and MariBell — are the largest regional grid developments in decades. While grid modernization is essential, municipal utilities must consider the potential downstream effects on their customers, ensure communities are protected against disproportionate financial burdens, and guarantee that local reliability needs are met.

Both the BECI and MariBell projects are major backbone additions designated under the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) regional planning framework, carrying significant cost implications for all Wisconsin ratepayers. Because these are interstate lines, and Wisconsin does not have "right-of-first-refusal" legislation in place, both projects were subject to a competitive-bidding process. The MariBell project was awarded to developers who do not currently own transmission assets in Wisconsin.

The MariBell Transmission Project is a proposed 140-mile, high-capacity line stretching from Marion, Minn., to Bell Center, Wis. This project involves construction of a double-circuit electric transmission line (765 kV and 161 kV) crossing western Wisconsin counties — including Vernon and Crawford. It is part of the MISO plan to increase cross-border power transfer capacity along the Mississippi River. GridLiance Heartland (part of NextEra Energy Transmission) is a co-developer, along with Dairyland Power Cooperative, which will oversee the Minnesota portion of the line.

The BECI Project is an expansive, roughly 190-mile, 765-kilovolt transmission line. Originating at Bell Center in Crawford County, BECI spans southern Wisconsin across Richland, Sauk, Columbia, Dodge, Dane, Jefferson, Rock, and Walworth counties before terminating at the Illinois state line. The MISO bid was awarded to Midcontinent Grid Solutions (MGS), which is a joint venture formed between Transource Energy, LLC and BHE Transmission (a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway Energy). MGS was established to develop, construct, and operate large-scale regional transmission projects and was selected through MISO's competitive-bidding process to develop, own, and manage the BECI Project.

While these projects aim to address regional capacity issues and prevent MISO-wide overloads, multi-billion-dollar transmission investments inevitably trigger long-term cost recovery mechanisms. For municipal utilities, every dollar added to regional transmission charges directly impacts budgets and ultimately flows through to customers' electric bills.

In an effort to lookout for our members and our customers, MEUW, Great Lakes Utilities (GLU), and Upper Midwest Municipal Electric Utilities Group (UMMEG) have jointly filed for intervener status with the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) on MGS's petition for utility status in Wisconsin. This filing is in addition to WPPI Energy's intervener filing.



We are concerned about cost-allocation equity given that this project could introduce a new, out-of-state, transmission company and what that will mean for municipal electric utilities and customers. Local grid integration must be carefully coordinated to ensure that these massive transmission corridors will effectively integrate with our local distribution systems and enhance local reliability. We also want to ensure that these projects will be the most cost-effective means of delivering our long-term energy needs.

By establishing formal party status in the PSC docket, municipal electric utilities ensure that community-owned power providers have a seat at the table — advocating for fiscal discipline, transparent planning, and a resilient, affordable energy future for Wisconsin. We will continue to provide updates as to the status of these large transmission projects.

See how easy it is to get involved in advocacy activities — attend December webinar



Advocating in the best interests of municipal utilities is foundational to MEUW's existence. Having members actively engage in the association's advocacy work is vital to the mission of unifying and strengthening public power here at home. Make plans to join your public power colleagues for **"Advocacy 101"** — a free 60-minute webinar on Thursday, Dec. 3 at 10:00 a.m. — to learn about the legislative process and hear how everyday people are using their voices to influence lawmakers.

In this interactive session, MEUW will break down the basics in a simple, practical way. Participants will take away:

- What advocacy is (and how it's different from lobbying);
- Why advocacy matters – to our communities, industry;
- An understanding about the key decision-makers, who they are and how they shape policy; and
- Ideas to share your story and get your message across.

The webinar will also include a short practice exercise to try out an "elevator pitch" and share tips for having conversations with lawmakers.

No experience is required — just bring your curiosity and a willingness to give it a try. By the end, you'll walk away with a few simple tools and a better understanding of how everyday people can make a real difference. The webinar is free, but pre-registration is required. Sign up today.

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When fire safety meets cybersecurity

*The following information is a learning scenario recently discussed during a meeting of MEUW's Cyber and Physical Security Working Group. If you'd like to learn more, or have questions for the group, please contact Kaukauna Utilities' **Don Krause** at (920) 766-5721.*

The Scenario: Smoke at the Substation

It's 2:15 AM. Your utility's Operations Center receives a fire alarm from an unmanned substation.

The building has a network-connected fire alarm monitoring system, electronic door access, security cameras, and remote environmental monitoring.

Situation 1 — The Alarm

The fire alarm reports smoke in the equipment room, but the security camera feed is unavailable.

Question: How would your utility verify the alarm and safely respond without relying on the camera system?

Situation 2 — The Cyber Connection

While investigating, I.T. discovers unusual network activity involving the building management system. It's unclear whether the fire alarm is genuine, malfunctioning, or being manipulated.

Question: Who decides whether to disconnect the affected network, and could doing so interfere with fire detection, notification, or emergency access?

Situation 3 — The Complication

Firefighters arrive, but the electronic access control system isn't responding. Meanwhile, the Operations Center has lost visibility into several building systems.

Question: Do your emergency responders have a reliable way to enter the facility and assess conditions without depending on network connectivity?

The Takeaway

We often think of fire protection as a physical safety system and cybersecurity as an I.T. responsibility. But, as these systems become connected, their risks overlap. Here are three questions to ask yourself:

- Do we know which fire and life-safety systems depend on our networks?
- Can those systems continue protecting people during a cyber incident or network outage?
- Have I.T., Operations, Facilities, and emergency responders agreed on how to respond when both physical and digital systems are affected?

MEUW *News Monitor*

Develop your coaching skills with this training

Get ready for a great 2027 by investing in your own professional development through this Dec. 2 Leading Through Coaching course. As part of MEUW's professional development programming, this one-day leadership development course focuses on knowing how and when to coach — highlighting the skills and emotional intelligence needed to coach others effectively. Good coaches are seen as role models and therefore need to understand those things that cause them to have frustration, negative self-talk, and, in turn, keep them from channeling their emotions productively. Knowing yourself will help you to be more effective as a leader and a coach resulting in the ability to effectively develop others. Registration and details about what you'll learn are available here.

Refine your communications and project management skills

Mastering strategic communication and project management isn't just useful — it's the backbone of a thriving municipal utility. By completing this one-day training that is part of MEUW's Fundamentals of Utility Leadership Management series, municipal utility professionals will equip themselves with essential communication and project-management skills to enhance operational success. Participants will learn to effectively plan and prioritize tasks, provide constructive feedback, and track projects to ensure nothing is overlooked. The class emphasizes clear communication — both in giving directions and active listening — to foster meaningful feedback and understanding. Registration is now open for the Feb. 10 class here.

Biennial Credit and Collections Seminar set for March in Wisconsin Dells

Every other year, MEUW hosts a seminar to share information about the rules and regulations for utility collections and provide attendees with tips and techniques to make the process more effective and efficient. The program is designed to help strengthen the public power utilities' collection process, with timing targeted at the end of the cold weather moratorium on electric service disconnection.

This year's seminar is planned for Wednesday, March 10 in Wisconsin Dells. The agenda includes a refresher from the Public Service Commission (PSC) about disconnection, deferred payment arrangements, deposits, and foreclosures. There will be updated details about resources available to help customers who qualify for energy assistance, and discussions of best practices. Full details will be available soon. Learn more here.

Industry News

Federal government release $3.6 billion to fund LIHEAP

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Community Services has released $3.6 billion in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding for fiscal year 2027, which began Oct. 1. The funding represents 90% of the total annualized amount made available for LIHEAP under the Continuing Appropriations (CA) and Extensions Act, 2027 (Pub. L. 119-103) enacted this summer.

The American Public Power Association (APPA), has been working with the National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition to ensure that the bulk of LIHEAP funding is released as early as possible so that local community action agencies can help to ensure critical winter month relief.

PSC approves new natural gas plants to meet rising demand

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) on Oct. 15 unanimously approved plans to build two natural gas power plants in southeastern Wisconsin to help meet growing electricity demand, particularly from data centers. The Foundry Ridge Energy Center in Walworth County would generate 324 megawatts (MW), with operations targeted for 2028, while the Red Oak Ridge Energy Center in Kenosha County would generate nearly 1,200 MW, with a target date of 2030. The projects are being developed by Chicago-based Invenergy and represent about 1.5 gigawatts of generating capacity and more than $2 billion in estimated construction and acquisition costs.

The approvals drew criticism from environmental groups concerned about air pollution, health impacts, and costs to customers. PSC commissioners also questioned whether current state law gives regulators sufficient authority to fully evaluate project costs, need, and alternatives. We Energies — the state's largest utility — has applied to acquire the plants as part of its plans to expand generation resources amid forecasts of a 40% increase in Wisconsin electricity demand by 2032.

Evers, PSC award $11.5 million for clean energy projects

Gov. Tony Evers and the PSC announced $11.5 million in Energy Innovation Grant Program funding for 36 projects statewide. Recipients include school districts, non-profits, local and Tribal governments, manufacturers, and higher education institutions. The grants support energy efficiency, demand response, renewable energy, energy storage, and comprehensive energy planning. Created in 2017, the program has awarded $51.5 million to 205 projects across Wisconsin. Additional information about the program can be found on the PSC website here.

Wisconsin Rapids denies permit to build data center

The Wisconsin Rapids Common Council voted unanimously Oct. 20 to deny a conditional use permit for a data center proposed on the site of a former paper mill.

The permit would have allowed the data center to be built on the 220-acre site. The council's vote came after intense public pushback and months of debate and was met with cheers from people in attendance.

An attorney representing PNK Group, the company behind the proposed development, addressed the Council before the vote, asking members to either approve the permit, or refer the project back to the Planning Commission, which has recommended the permit be denied.

Earlier in October, a moratorium on data centers took effect, placing a 12-month freeze on construction and additional restrictions on future data centers within the city.

Wisconsin Rapids Mayor Matt Zacher said the denial and the moratorium give the city more time to update its ordinances governing data centers and how to approach future proposals.

Owners cancel plans to build long-delayed gas plant in northern Wisconsin

La Crosse-based Dairyland Power Cooperative and South Shore Energy, a subsidiary of Minnesota-based Allete, are canceling plans for a proposed $1 billion gas-fired power plant. The Nemadji Trail Energy Center was to be built on the shore of Lake Superior. The companies asked the PSC to withdraw its approval of the project in a letter filed Oct. 28.

The PSC issued certificates of public convenience and necessity authorizing construction of 625-MW plant in 2020. At the time it was announced, the utilities said the facility would provide reliable electricity as they moved away from coal and invested in renewable energy.

The project encountered years of legal challenges and opposition from local residents, environmental groups, and members of the Fond du Lac and Red Cliff Bands of Lake Superior Chippewa.





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Partnering with Wisconsin utilities

State regulators approve new four-year plan to sustain statewide energy-efficiency program

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin has approved the Focus on Energy plan for 2027–2030, providing direction for the next four years of Wisconsin's statewide energy-efficiency program. The plan builds on familiar offerings while expanding support for customers who face barriers to participation. For utilities, it outlines new opportunities to connect residents and businesses with energy-saving improvements and places greater emphasis on reducing summer peak electricity demand.

By the Numbers

The plan anticipates a total four-year budget of $495.3 million, including approximately $425.3 million to support customer incentives and program delivery. The remaining $70 million will support program oversight and administration, including evaluation, fiscal management, and regulatory compliance. Consistent with historical budget allocations, roughly 40% of the incentive funding will support residential customers, and 60% will support businesses.

The four-year plan includes $25 million in renewable energy incentives and a summer peak demand reduction target of approximately 247 megawatts. It also introduces winter peak reduction targets of approximately 162 megawatts for electricity and 515,000 therms for natural gas. These new targets will help Focus measure how energy efficiency improvements reduce demand during winter peak periods and use those findings to guide future offerings.

Energy savings targets total 23.6 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity and 1.49 billion therms of natural gas over the lifetimes of the improvements supported during the period.

Business Portfolio

Business offerings will remain largely consistent, continuing to serve farms, commercial buildings, industrial facilities, schools, and government customers. Energy Advisors will help customers identify improvements, evaluate potential savings, and navigate incentives.

A targeted small business initiative is planned for 2028, with approximately $12 million budgeted over three years. It will address challenges such as limited capital, competing priorities, and a lack of staff time to manage projects. Key features include enhanced incentives and dedicated Small Business Navigators who can guide eligible customers from identifying opportunities through completing improvements.

Utilities will be important partners in reaching these businesses. Their local relationships can help identify customers who would benefit from additional assistance and connect them with trusted support.

Residential Portfolio

Residential offerings will be organized around single-family and multifamily customers, with additional support for limited-income households. Familiar resources, including free energy-saving packs, the Online Marketplace, and equipment and weatherization incentives, will continue.

Beginning in 2028, planned additions include retailer-delivered discounts for eligible appliances and incentives for heating and cooling tune-ups. Targeted offerings will also include window rebates for limited-income households, contractor-delivered assessments for moderate-income households, and enhanced incentives for multifamily affordable housing.

The plan sets a goal for Communities of Focus, areas with historically lower participation and receipt of program benefits, to account for at least 20% of residential lifetime energy savings by 2030. Partnerships with utilities and community organizations will help connect more households with these opportunities.

Demand Response Support

Focus on Energy will continue supporting utility demand response programs through coordinated marketing, customer referrals, and incentives for compatible equipment, including smart thermostats and heat pump water heaters. The plan targets at least 83,000 qualifying devices by 2030.

These technologies can help utilities and customers adjust electricity use during periods of high demand. Focus will share information about rebated equipment with utilities to support outreach and program planning, while utilities remain responsible for their load management program enrollment and operation. Purchasing eligible equipment will not automatically enroll customers in demand response and participation will remain their choice.

Implementer procurement is expected to begin in the second quarter of 2027, with new offerings scheduled to launch in January 2028.

For more information about the offerings outlined and priorities guiding this work, review full plan is available in the Public Service Commission's online docket 5-FE-105 at *psc.wi.gov*.

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MEUW Calendar of Events
Click here for a printable listing of **2027** dates

Save the date for MEUW's 2027 Day at the Capitol

Mark your calendar and make plans to attend MEUW's "Day at the Capitol" on Thursday, April 1, 2027, in Madison. The new legislature is expected to have a number of new faces, and this is our chance to educate them about municipal electric utilities.

There is no cost to participate, and MEUW will coordinate the meetings. After a brief informational session to review the issues and talking points, small groups will make their way to the Capitol to visit Senate and Assembly offices for pre-arranged meetings with legislators and their staffs. Full details will be communicated at a later date.

PSC plans to award another round of Grid Resilience grants

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) is accepting applications for the second round of its Grid Resilience Program, which supports projects that strengthen electric system reliability against extreme weather, wildfire, and other natural disasters. The program reserves 75% of funding for smaller utilities and encourages projects involving grid hardening, weatherization, advanced monitoring technologies, undergrounding, fire prevention, and workforce development. Approximately $7.2 million is available immediately, with up to $9.7 million more possible through 2029. Applications are due Feb. 22, 2027.

The PSC's Office of Energy Innovation will hold a webinar on application instructions for the Grid Resilience Program on Nov. 5. Register for the webinar here.

The holiday season is fast approaching, and with it comes **holiday parades**! We'd like to celebrate our members all decked out for the season. Send photos of your utility vehicles in your community's festivities to *news@meuw.org*



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

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