

energy

CONNECTIONS

March 2009

NorthWestern
Energy
Delivering a Bright Future

in this issue...

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YOUR BILLS - EASIER

DID YOU KNOW?

Is Your Street in the Dark?

Nearly 111,000 streetlights, yard lights and commercial lights illuminate highways and city streets in NorthWestern Energy's service territory. Of these, the utility owns and maintains close to 90 percent. In addition, we provide street light maintenance service in Montana for approximately 81,000 lights owned by cities, counties, the state and various agencies. The remainder are owned and maintained by others.

Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing if your street light is out unless you report it. It is not NorthWestern's practice to patrol the streets; we rely on your notification to inform us of an outage. If you notice a street light in need of maintenance, call our Customer Contact Center to report it and we will assist in identifying which agency owns the light and if it is NorthWestern's we will dispatch crews to repair the problem. ■



PHOTO BY RANDY LOVELESS



Life Support Customer Safety During Power Outages

NorthWestern Energy knows how important reliable electric and gas service is to our customers, especially those using life-support devices. We make every effort to prevent outages but sometimes storms, equipment failure, and other events cause them to occur.

We want to remind you to please be prepared in case temporary power outages do occur. Some things that you can do to prepare for power outages include:

- ◆ Keep phone numbers of emergency response agencies (e.g., 911, hospital, fire department, police) in a convenient location, in the event emergency assistance is needed.
- ◆ Ensure that you have a back-up telephone if you use a cordless or other telephone that is dependent on electricity;
- ◆ Have an alternate plan in place to ensure the continuity of any life-support needs. This may include making special arrangements to spend time with a friend or relative during an outage or using a back-up generator.
- ◆ If you use a back-up generator, please understand that customers are responsible for the safe installation, use, and maintenance of any back-up power.
- ◆ Keep a battery-powered radio on hand and a supply of fresh batteries to stay aware of news and other information.

NorthWestern Energy will make an attempt to notify you if your service will be interrupted due to planned maintenance, repair or construction. We are unable, of course, to provide advance notice of unscheduled power interruptions due to such events as storms, accidents, vandalism or equipment failure.

If someone in your household uses life support equipment, make arrangements in advance for a back-up power supply or transportation to another facility. NorthWestern continually strives to prevent inconvenience to our customers. ■

Report an Outage or Emergency

Always call NorthWestern Energy to report an electric or gas outage or emergency such as a downed power line or gas leak. NorthWestern will arrive as quickly as possible. If the emergency is in or around your home, we recommend that you wait a safe distance nearby for us to arrive.

In the event we find a gas problem, we may temporarily shut off gas supply until all necessary repairs have been made to ensure the situation is safe.

Our phone lines may become very busy during major storms, so we ask for your patience if you are trying to reach us. ■

24-hour Electric and Gas Emergency Contacts:

Electric Emergency/Power Outage	(888) 467-2353 in Montana (800) 245-6977 in South Dakota
Gas Emergency/Gas Odor	(888) 467-2427 in Montana (800) 245-6977 in South Dakota and Nebraska
Report Street Light Outages	(888) 467-2669 in Montana (800) 245-6977 in South Dakota

Workplace Safety Reminders for Farmers And Ranchers



As farmers and ranchers, you have a lot on your minds – from the global economic crisis to the daily challenges of working and living on the land. With these distractions, it might be easy to lose sight of safe farm and ranch work practices – especially around electric and natural gas lines.

However, working safely around power lines and buried pipelines takes two simple steps:

- ◆ Look up and Live, and
- ◆ Call Before You Dig

“Look up and live” is a phrase that could save someone’s life. When at work or play, remind others to look up for overhead power lines before beginning any activity, especially when moving equipment and raising long or tall objects.

Remember the 10-foot circle of safety rule: keep everyone and everything – you, tools, materials and equipment – at least 10 feet away from overhead power lines. Make the safety circle even bigger for higher voltage power lines.

Assume all overhead lines, including service drops that run from utility poles to buildings, are energized and dangerous.

If your tractor, truck, combine or other equipment makes contact with a power line, move the equipment away from the line, if you can do so safely. If you cannot move the equipment, warn others to stay away and call 911 or the NorthWestern Energy emergency line. As long as the equipment is in contact with the line, stay on it until utility workers say it is safe to get off. If you must get off the equipment because of fire or another emergency, JUMP clear of the equipment with both feet together, making sure that you are never in contact with the equipment and the ground at the same time. Once you are off the equipment, hop away from it.

Working around buried natural gas lines poses another challenge that is not as easy to identify. At least two days before you dig or move dirt in any way, call 811 to request that all underground utilities, including natural gas lines, are marked – for free.

Below are steps for safe excavation:

1. Mark your proposed excavation or dig area with white paint.
2. Call 811 at least two days before you plan to work.
3. Wait until the utilities are located before moving any dirt.
4. Maintain the locate marks so you can see them throughout your project.
5. Hand excavate within 24 inches on each side of marked utilities.

If your equipment contacts a natural gas line, turn off the equipment and get away from the site quickly. Running equipment can be a source of ignition. Warn others to stay away and call 911 and NorthWestern Energy’s emergency line. Do not attempt to turn off the flow of gas at any pipeline valves and leave the excavation open.

Look Up and Live and *Call Before You Dig* are simple phrases that go a long way to ensure that you and others on your land return home safely at the end of every day. ■

did you know?

Energy theft is costly in so many ways. It is a crime that creates deadly fire and safety hazards that can kill or injure the energy thieves as well as their families, neighbors and NorthWestern employees. In addition, it raises the energy bills of customers who pay their bills on time. Just as shoplifters drive up the price of merchandise you purchase, those who tamper with meters to get “free” energy drive up your energy costs.

NorthWestern Energy is serious about protecting our customers from the dangers and increased costs caused by energy theft. Our employees are trained to detect signs of meter tampering and energy theft. Anonymous tips from customers are an important means to investigating potential energy theft. If you suspect or know of anyone stealing energy – especially if it is happening in your neighborhood, protect yourself and please report it. You can call our Customer Contact Center or send an e-mail through the Contact Us link at www.northwesternenergy.com. ■

contact

MONTANA

Customer Contact Center	
7 a.m. - 6 p.m. M-F	(888) 467-2669
Emergency 24/7 Service	
Electric	(888) 467-2353
Natural Gas	(888) 467-2427
Call Before You Dig	811
Energy Efficiency	(800) 823-5995

NEBRASKA

Customer Contact Center	
6 a.m. - 10 p.m. M-F	(800) 245-6977
Emergency 24/7 Service	(800) 245-6977
Call Before You Dig	811

SOUTH DAKOTA

Customer Contact Center	
6 a.m. - 10 p.m. M-F	(800) 245-6977
Emergency 24/7 Service	(800) 245-6977
Call Before You Dig	811

PAYMENT

Automated Phone	
Payment Option:	(800) 218-4959
(via checking, savings, or money market account)	

SpeedPay Automated	
Phone Payment Option:	(877) 361-4927
(via credit card account)	

Budgeting That Makes Managing Your Bills - EASIER

With Budget Billing and EZ Pay, two free programs that work together, we provide you with consistent bill amounts and automatic payments.

You can pay the same amount each month and, if you choose, it can also be automatically deducted from your checking or savings account. Budget Billing amounts are calculated based upon your past 12 months of usage and current rates. NorthWestern Energy will review your Budget Billing amount periodically to prevent a large overpayment or underpayment from accumulating on your account and changes may be necessary due to an increase or decrease in your usage patterns and/or rates.

Signing up is easy – you can either call our Customer Contact Center or log-on to My Energy Account online. While your account remains in good standing, you can remain in the program as long as you like. ■

