



*Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association*

# 2020



## *Year in Review*

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*MMUA closed on the purchase of the MMUA Training Center property on March 4, 2020. MMUA began leasing the approximately 18 acre property in 1999 and has made numerous improvements since then. This picture shows a portion of the property.*

## About MMUA

The Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association is a non-profit entity representing 124 electric, approximately 170 water, and 33 natural gas distribution utilities owned and operated by cities across the state. MMUA strives to be a recognized leader in advocacy, bringing value to municipal utilities and enhancing their position within the industry.

MMUA's mission is to support and serve as a common voice for municipal utilities. Its core values: People, Safety, Advocacy, Teamwork, Communication, Creativity, Dedication, Integrity, and Environment. For more about MMUA, its mission and values, visit us online at [www.mmua.org](http://www.mmua.org)

# Timeline

## January

January 21-22: MMUA holds a sold-out workshop on Overhead and Underground Line Design at the Plymouth Comfort Inn. Twenty-three attend. John Miner is our instructor.

January 29-30: MMUA staff completes its move into new office space at 3131 Fernbrook Lane N., Suite 200, Plymouth MN 55447. The move is necessary due to the sale and demolition of our former office across the street.

## February

Feb. 5: Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMM-PA) announces a plan to reshape its generation portfolio through the retirement of the Sherco 3 coal-fired power plant in 2030, to be replaced primarily with wind and solar generation.

February 7: Five graduate from the Firstline Supervision class meeting at Central Lakes College in Brainerd, followed Feb. 21 with another graduate from a group meeting at the MMUA office.

Feb. 11-14: Fifty-seven people from 36 different utilities attend the MMUA Meter School. Thirty-seven people from 24 utilities attend the Pre-Conference, which ran half-days Feb. 11-12. The School started the afternoon of Feb. 12 and ran through the morning of Feb. 14. The training events were held at the MMUA Training Center in Marshall.

Feb. 19-20: Prompted by a steady march of 'mutual aid' events, MMUA convenes an Emergency Preparedness & Restoration Conference, at the River's Edge Convention Center in St. Cloud. The meeting is attend by 27 participants from 18 public power utilities.

Feb. 24-26: The American Public Power Association (APPA) Legislative Rally is held in Washington, D.C. The event reflects a recognition of the federal government's distant but profound influence over municipal utility operations and costs. Representatives of Minnesota public power systems meet with their Senators, Representatives and staff to educate them on how federal policy impacts their utilities and their communities. Sixty-one people attend under the MMUA banner.



*State government confirmed in 2020 what we already knew: that utility workers are 'essential.' The designation removed any doubt utility workers would be kept from their jobs in a shut-down pandemic world.*

## March

March 4: MMUA closes on the purchase of 18 acres of land from the City of Marshall. The property comprises the campus of our training center in Marshall. MMUA had been renting the land from the city since 1999.

March 4-5: the class of 2020 begins Leadership Academy. This is the fourth group to go through the program. Eighteen students enroll.

March 12: MMUA receives its first Coronavirus-related event cancellation notice from a member. This ominous note came three months from the time news circulated of Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases in Wuhan, China. The cancellation trickle is soon a torrent.

March 13: A large group of nine people graduate from First-line Supervision.

March 13: Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz declares a peacetime emergency and MMUA suspends member visits by staff through April 3 (later extended to April 30). The move comes particularly hard for an association dedicated to providing

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in-person, hands-on education and training, often at member locations.

March 17: Gov. Walz first orders bars and restaurants to close.

March 25: Gov. Walz issues a 'stay at home' executive order, which contains exemptions for 'essential' workers, including electric, gas, water and wastewater workers. The order, designed to give the state's health care system time to prepare for an expected surge in COVID-19 cases, goes into effect March 28 and is set to expire April 10.

Municipal utilities continue to provide essential services to the public while taking steps to protect the health of their employees.

March 25: Steve Kelley, Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Commerce (DOC) and Katie Sieben, Chair of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, request utilities extend Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule for the duration of the national security or state peacetime emergency.

With its office closed, MMUA staff embarks on a diligent effort to learn about COVID-19, how to best combat the virus on multiple fronts, communicate the information in a digestible format, and maintain a consistent safety message to all departments.

Like dominoes falling, a series of MMUA workshops and schools are postponed, delayed or cancelled. These include:

- PCB Workshop (March 17-18, cancelled).
- Substation School (March 24-26, cancelled).
- Legislative Conference (March 31-April 1, cancelled).
- Generation School (April 21-23, delayed).

In addition, the APPA Lineworkers Rodeo and Engineering & Operations Conference are cancelled.

## April

April 15: Having located a source of KN95 masks from China, MMUA sends out a solicitation for mask orders to the membership.

April 18: Shane Shannon St. Clair, MMUA regional safety coordinator/job training and safety instructor, dies in a motorcycle accident near Viborg, South Dakota. St. Clair, 55, of Sioux Falls, joined MMUA in June 2015.

April 21: MMUA places an order for 46,000 KN95 masks.

April 28: Top four finishers are selected in the MMUA Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarship Contest.



*MMUA Regional Safety Coordinator Joe Schmidt picked up a shipment of KN95 respiratory masks at the MMUA office in Plymouth. Schmidt delivered the masks while making his rounds of member sites in central Minnesota.*

April 28: APPA cancels its National Conference and Expo—scheduled for June 5-10, in Long Beach, California.

## May

May 7: Great River Energy (GRE) announces plans to retire the 1,151-megawatt (MW) Coal Creek Station, in the second half of 2022. The generation and transmission cooperative plans to replace that generating capacity with a variety of resources, mainly wind.

May 13: Gov. Walz informs legislative leaders that he is extending by another 30 days his peacetime emergency declaration. This action is repeated throughout the year.

May 18: Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz's extended 'stay-at-home' executive order expires and is replaced with a "stay safe Minnesota" order. MMUA staff returns to the office on a limited, "as needed" basis. Many cities open their doors to the public, on or between May 18 and June 1.

May 20: The first shipment of the MMUA respiratory mask order arrives in our Plymouth office. Along with 'social distancing,' the wearing of respiratory masks is a common response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Delivery is typically handled by an MMUA regional safety coordinator—by this time we were again making visits to most member cities.

May 25: The year gets incalculably worse as George Floyd dies while being taken into custody by Minneapolis police. The city becomes the epicenter of protests and rioting, which spread across the country.

May 29: Bonnie Lou Hayes, age 72, of Annandale passes away peacefully, surrounded by her family. Bonnie is mourned by many associated with MMUA, having retired from the Association in the late summer of 2010, after more than 27 years of service.

## June

June 25: Gov. Walz announces that he will distribute \$841 million in federal funds to cities, counties, and townships for Coronavirus-related expenses.

## July

July 14-16: MMUA holds its annual Generation School, headquartered in Hutchinson. Hands-on sessions are held in the Delano and Glencoe municipal power plants. The school is the first MMUA meeting held following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing is practiced, where practical. Everybody wears a mask, washes hands frequently and follows other recommended health guidelines. With 20 attendees, attendance is down compared to past years.

## August

Aug. 8: MMUA mutual aid network responds as Granite Falls is among the areas hit with damaging summer storms. Cody Raveling, MMUA's training center coordinator/job training and safety instructor, is in Granite Falls by 6:45 the next morning. He is followed shortly afterward by crews from the Benson, Olivia and Willmar municipal utilities. Marshall Municipal Utilities sends two crews, and Electrical Superintendent Larry Lamote.

August 13: The MMUA board approves the engagement of a commercial realtor to conduct a physical and financial evaluation of the building MMUA has recently moved into to help the board decide whether to make an offer to purchase the building.

Aug. 25-26: Unable to meet in person for the first time since the association is formed in 1931, MMUA holds a 'virtual' Summer Conference. Mark Nibaur of Austin Utilities takes over as MMUA president, from Vernell Roberts of Detroit Lakes. Jenny Palmer of Winthrop is elected president-elect, placing her in line to become MMUA's first female president. Don Martodam of Hawley is selected by the board as its secretary-treasurer.

Roberts recognizes municipal utility employees with the MMUA President's Award. The recognition is for the essential employees' contribution to keeping the lights on, the water running, and everything else a city or utility provides.



*Vernell Roberts of Detroit Lakes awarded the state's municipal utility employees the MMUA President's Award for 2020. The award is MMUA's highest honor.*

New members elected to the MMUA Board of Directors, during the Summer Conference, included these four people: Bruce DeBlieck, commissioner, Willmar Municipal Utilities; Joe Hoffman, city administrator and utility manager, Preston Public Utilities; Kevin Lee, finance director, Marshall Municipal Utilities; Chris Trembley, general manager, Madelia Municipal Light & Power.

At the Conference, MMUA unveils its new logo.

## September

Sept. 15-18: MMUA holds its annual Overhead School at our Training Center in Marshall. The school is held along with our partners, the Minnesota Rural Electric Association and American Public Power Association. Twenty-six municipal lineworkers attend, half of whom are enrolled in the apprentice lineworker development program.

The Annual Lineworkers' Rodeo, scheduled for Sept. 15, is cancelled.

## October

Oct. 6-9: Pandemic or not, electric utility workers need to be properly trained. MMUA continues that essential work with its annual 2020 Underground School, held at the MMUA Training Center in Marshall. Twenty municipal lineworkers attend, half of whom are enrolled in Apprentice Lineworker Training program. We partner with the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) and American Public Power Association (APPA) to offer the school.

Oct. 6-8: MMUA holds its annual Cross Training School, in conjunction with the Underground School. Six people attend.

October 9: Six graduate from a Firstline Supervision group meeting in Plymouth, followed by five graduates on Oct. 23 from a group meeting in Brainerd.

October 21: The MMUA board decides not to pursue purchase of our current office building.

October 21-22: a snowy Tree Trimming School is held in Brainerd. Thirty-two people attend.

## November

November 2: Jay Reading joins MMUA as a regional safety coordinator/job training and safety instructor.

November 3: This date is set for the 2020 General Election. Many vote early. The vote count, re-counts and legal challenges continue for weeks. Joe Biden is declared president. Control of the U.S. Senate is delayed until January due to a run-off election for two seats from Georgia.

November 5: With COVID numbers on the rise again, MMUA cancels its 2020 Holiday Party.

Nov. 18-20: FirstLine Supervision class scheduled for these dates is postponed.

Nov 19: Gov. Walz places strong restrictions on bars, restaurants and certain other businesses and prohibits social gatherings of more than 10 people and more than three households.

MMUA cancels its annual Technical & Operations Conference, scheduled for Dec. 8-10. The Association begins planning on a 'virtual' meeting, with date uncertain.

November 30: Keith Byklum joins MMUA as a regional safety coordinator.



*The MMUA Leadership Academy moved to a virtual format, out of necessity. The class of 2020 held its final meeting via Zoom. Participants felt the Academy still held value.*

## December

With COVID cases rising and restrictions in place, all events cancelled.

December 3: Leadership Academy, now meeting virtually, graduates its fourth group, which includes 16 students.

December 7: MMUA Executive Director Jack Kegel announces his retirement to the MMUA board. Following discussions with the board regarding timing, Kegel plans to retire in the fall of 2021.

December 31: Kevin Thompson, long-time safety employee and MMUA's first Training Center coordinator, retires.

# By the Numbers

## Minnesota Government Relations

64: APPA rally attendees from MMUA, 23 utilities, six power agencies, and family members.

21: MMUA Government Relations Committee meetings.

21: issues of the Capitol Letter published.

3,482: Regular session legislative bills introduced and reviewed for relevance (1,708 Senate files and 1,774 House files) plus 697 special session bills (381 House files, 316 Senate files).

14: hearings before Legislature's suspension of in-person activities.

8: virtual legislative hearings and public meetings.

136: new laws enacted (118 regular session and 18 special session).

Numerous: Electric Utility Diversity Group meetings.

4: meetings with Department of Commerce on electric service disconnection.

7: underground excavation stakeholder or lobbyist group meetings with MnOPS.

1: Distributed Generation Work Group meeting.

3: Distributed Generation Advisory Group meetings.

2: Continuing legal education seminars by Minnesota State Bar Association, Public Utilities Section.

6: Midwestern Clean Fuels Initiative meetings.

6: Drive Electric MN meetings.

3: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Clean Water Discussion Series meetings.

## Federal Government Relations

MMUA Washington Representative Michael Nolan carried Minnesota Public Power's message. He keeps a close eye as Congress passes three COVID-19 legislative packages

in March, and one in April, including the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Key issues include:

- Stimulus checks/direct payments
- Hospitals and medical first responders
- Small business 'paycheck protection program.'
- Increases in LIHEAP funding
- No national federal moratorium for utility shutoffs
- Coronavirus Relief Fund created at Federal Reserve, with some public power communities using the federal spending program.

In May, the House passes Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act—a massive \$3 trillion stimulus package to supplement the CARES Act. The bill includes national moratorium against utility disconnections. Senate does not hear the bill.

A December COVID legislative package includes LIHEAP increase to \$3.6 billion, with billions in federal R&D funding for alternative energy sources, energy storage, nuclear power, and smart grid technology. The bill also includes extensions for tax credits for wind and solar, and carbon capture and sequestration projects.

The 116th Congress finally adjourns January 1.

16,601: bills introduced; 324 become law.

## Engineering and Policy Analysis

Bob Jagusch, MMUA director of engineering and policy analysis spent countless hours poring over technical issues. He also represented MMUA member interests at:

34: meetings attended, in-person or virtually.

These meetings were mostly with various agencies of the state of Minnesota, but also included federal proceedings and with the Midwest Governor's Association.

Topics spanned the range from the Minnesota distributed generation Technical Specification Manual to cyber-security.



*Hands-on training at the MMUA Training Center in Marshall took on a new look with the wearing of masks and distancing.*

**Our main office:**

**3131 Fernbrook Lane N.,  
Suite 200  
Plymouth, MN 55447  
Phone: 763-551-1230  
1-800-422-0119  
[www.mmua.org](http://www.mmua.org)**

*Additional offices at:*

MMUA Training Center  
1004 Michigan Road  
Marshall, MN 56258

*Legislative office:*

161 St. Anthony Ave.  
Suite 800  
St. Paul, MN 55103