

Load Control Receiver Change-outs

BACKGROUND

Load control switches allow utilities to remotely control end-use loads and control levels of electrical flow to economize electric use during peak times, saving both the utility and the customer money while promoting efficient electricity use. In Minnesota, much of this equipment has reached its usable end of life. Utilities replace load controller receiver technology routinely as equipment becomes obsolete. A typical replacement installation only takes about 15 minutes and is usually completed by an electrician. The decades-long practice had been to consider replacements that do not require new circuit wiring as a minor repair of equipment; thus, exempting the installation from the permitting and inspection process. Unfortunately, this long-term practice of exempting load switch replacements from the permit process has recently seen a reversal in Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) practice.

CURRENT STATUS

Currently, there is a lot of inconsistency. Some inspection departments are providing guidance that no permits are required, while other utilities/contractors have been informed by DLI and local inspection departments that they are violating state law by not drawing a permit and having the new switch inspected. Some have even been told that their license could be revoked. This new and inconsistent interpretation causes difficulties and questions for both utilities and electrical contractors alike.

This change from past business practices serves little, if any, purpose while increasing costs and paperwork; creating delays awaiting inspections; and causing confusion as to when the equipment must be sealed and when it can be used prior to inspection. The situation is beginning to cause some utilities to rethink the value of such equipment, which may lead them to forego installation. The lack of this new equipment could have the adverse effect of increasing peak time use, as well as potentially increasing the need for additional generation, transmission, and distribution infrastructure.

REQUESTED ACTION

Ideally DLI will reverse its current “permit and inspection required” reading of applicable law and revert back to the commonly accepted practice of allowing the replacement of load management switches without the need to have a permit drawn and an inspection made. However, if the issue is not resolved administratively, MMUA will work with the Minnesota

2021 Position Statement

Rural Electric Association to seek clarification in statutes that such replacement installations are considered minor repairs and are thus exempt from the need for new permits and inspections.

Similar clarification may be needed to address permitting and inspection requirements related to the use of CFIs.