

Utilities Section Newsletter

League of Nebraska Municipalities

October 2024

Utilities/Public Works Section Annual Conference coming in January!

By Lash Chaffin,
Utilities Section Director

Mark Your Calendars! The 2025 League Utilities/Public Works Section Annual Conference is scheduled for Jan. 8-10 at the Graduate Hotel in Lincoln. In addition to the wonderful opportunities to share time and information with colleagues, there are some important educational opportunities. *The last several years, this conference was approved for an average of up to 17.5 wastewater operator hours and 15 water operator hours! We expect similar approval this year.*

On Jan. 8, the conference kicks off with an optional Preconference Seminar: **Thinking Ahead to Manage Valuable and Expensive Infrastructure** will focus on maintenance policies and effective purchasing techniques. (designed for 5 water credit hours and 5 wastewater credit hours). This is a “stand-alone” session. Preconference Seminar attendees do not have to register for the entire conference.

On Jan. 9-10, share time with your colleagues and learn how to better manage your utility and public works departments:

- **Lead Line Survey and Replacement:** Where Does Nebraska Stand?
- **Landlord Responsibility for**

Unpaid Utility Bills

- **First Look at How New Changes to Revenue and Spending Lids Will Affect Utilities and Public Works Departments**
- **Cybersecurity Awareness, Preparedness and Assessments:** Wow, the World Changed Fast!
- **Hall of Shame Utility and Public Works Injuries:** STOP DOING THESE THINGS!
- **New Federal Standards on Which Employees are Eligible For Overtime**
- **When is it Necessary to Use an Engineer or Architect?**
- **Nebraska’s New One Call “Hit Court”**
- **NDOT Infrastructure Grant Portal:** Potential Funding Made Easier
- **PFA Regulations are Now in Effect:** Water, Wastewater and Solid Waste Facilities Need to Pay Close Attention
- **Personal Cell Phones and Computers Utilized by Nebraska Utility Staff:** What Does the Law Actually Say?
- **Biology 101 for Municipal Utilities and Public Works Departments**
- **What are the Steps for a**

Customer to Sue Your Utility

- **Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act Update**
- **Municipal Utility and Public Works Legislative and Regulatory Update:** Whether you have a water, wastewater, electric, natural gas, street, recreation or other department, the Nebraska Legislature has a tremendous effect on how you do business. Do not miss the latest information on legislative and regulatory activities.
- **And much, much more!**

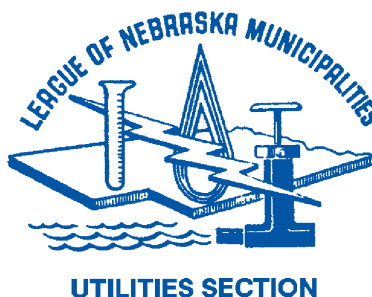
There will be water, wastewater, and engineering credits available for many of these sessions. Do not miss this great opportunity!

[Click here](#) for the program and delegate registration. [Click here](#) for the sponsor packet. To register online, [click here](#).

Future Snowball Conferences

The dates for future “Snowball” Wastewater Conferences have been scheduled and contracts signed with the Kearney Holiday Inn.

- Jan. 22-23, 2025
- Jan. 28-29, 2026
- Jan. 27-28, 2027
- Jan. 26-27, 2028



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Lash Chaffin
Utilities Section Director
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Utilities Field Representative

SAFETY/HEALTH CORNER

Extinguish the risk: Fire safety tips that light the way

By Jackson Sash, Utilities Field Rep./Training Coordinator

Fire safety and prevention are essential responsibilities in every environment, especially for utility workers who frequently operate in potentially hazardous areas. Fires can originate from various sources, and a single mistake can escalate into a dangerous situation that endangers lives, equipment, and property. Understanding fire risks and knowing how to prevent them is crucial, whether at home, in an office, or out in the field.

In residential and office settings, fire hazards may not always be immediately obvious but can be just as serious. In the home, common sources of fire include cooking appliances, candles, heaters, and smoking materials. For instance, unattended stovetops or burning candles can ignite nearby objects and quickly turn into uncontrollable fires. Likewise, smoking indoors without taking proper precautions is a leading cause of household fires. Ensuring cooking appliances are turned off after use, candles are kept away from flammable items,

and cigarettes are fully extinguished are key steps for fire prevention at home. Offices also contain their own potential hazards, such as overloaded electrical outlets, improperly maintained appliances, and outdated wiring. Fires that start in offices or homes often spread quickly because people are not always prepared to handle them, leading to costly damage and putting lives at risk.

In the field where utility workers spend much of their time, fire risks are even more pronounced. Many of the tools and vehicles used in utility work are gasoline or diesel powered, making fire safety essential. Gasoline is an extremely flammable liquid that can ignite from a single spark, even in seemingly controlled conditions. Tools like welders, cutting torches, and grinders, which are common in utility work, generate heat and sparks which can easily ignite flammable substances if handled carelessly. Before starting any task, it's important to inspect all equipment to ensure there are no fuel leaks or other potential ignition points and to clear the area of any



flammable material. For gasoline-powered tools, proper storage of fuel in approved sealed containers is crucial. Refueling should always be done in open areas, away from sparks or flames, and never while the equipment is running or still hot. Regular maintenance also plays a key role in fire prevention; a well-maintained tool is far less likely to malfunction or cause a fire.

Utility vehicles, which are frequently used in fieldwork, also carry inherent fire risks. Exhaust systems on vehicles can become extremely hot, and if parked on dry grass or near other flammable materials, they can easily start a fire. In wildfire-prone areas, these risks increase as dry conditions make

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Extinguish the risk: Fire safety tips that light the way

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vegetation highly susceptible to ignition. To reduce this risk, workers should avoid parking vehicles in grassy or dry brush areas, especially during the summer months when vegetation is driest. Regular vehicle inspections to check for fuel leaks and ensure exhaust systems are functioning properly help prevent accidental fires. By adhering to these preventive practices, utility workers can greatly reduce the risk of unintentional fires caused by vehicles.

Simple mistakes, such as failing to properly dispose of a lit cigarette, also can lead to fires, especially in outdoor environments with dry, combustible material. A lit cigarette

tossed carelessly into dry grass or bushes can spark a fire that quickly spreads out of control, particularly on windy days. Workers should use designated smoking areas, fully extinguish cigarettes, and avoid smoking in high-risk areas to minimize this danger. Carrying small fire suppression tools, such as a fire extinguisher or a container of water, can help to address minor fires immediately, preventing them from spreading. This is especially critical in remote locations where fires may not be detected until they've grown significantly, making containment more difficult.

Fire prevention is a team effort that relies on proactive measures, consistent vigilance, and an

understanding of potential fire risks in each environment. In homes and offices, this may mean following safe practices with electrical appliances and maintaining clear evacuation plans. For utility workers in the field, fire prevention demands extra caution with equipment, vehicles, and fuel storage. By maintaining safe habits and recognizing the potential hazards unique to each setting, workers can help to minimize the likelihood of fires, keeping themselves, their coworkers, and their communities safer. Through daily attention to fire safety practices, utility workers play a critical role in safeguarding the environments where they work and live.

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Service Awards

Remember to recognize your employees' anniversary milestones. The League provides certificates for 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, and 65.

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Retirements: Let us help recognize those municipal employees who are retiring after years of service.



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Electric Underground Recap

The Western Electric Underground School was held Sept. 4-5, 2024, at the Don Winkelman Training Field, located just north of Sidney. Following the registration, rolls, and coffee, the school started with vendor introductions and brief summaries of tasks, tools, and equipment available for use at this hands-on school.

Forty-nine lineworkers were in attendance with 39 from REAs and 10 from municipalities in Nebraska and Colorado. Nebraska municipalities in attendance were: Curtis, Gothenburg, Hemingford, Holdrege, and Sidney. These attendees were divided into five



Jim Meyer of Wesco instructing linemen how to locate primary and secondary conductors.

groups which rotated through five stations. Station one was locating primary and secondary conductors. Station two was practicing fault locating. Station three involved splicing of lines. Station four received instruction on how to correctly do a 600-amp termination. Station five involved the use of boring and vacuum equipment supplied by the City of Sidney to correctly install underground cables.

A special thanks to all the vendors and instructors who attended and helped to make this school possible. They are as follows in alphabetical order: Brian Winfield of Moehn Sales; Hannah Felten and Hope Bidlack of Primus Marketing; Brandon Neiger, Dalton Schilz, and Shaun Vrbka of the City of Sidney;



Brian Winfield of Moehn Sales instructing a group of linemen how to locate faults.

and Jim Meyer, Mike Palmer, Brady Harrington, and Mike Rhodes of Wesco.

Thank you again to all instructors, vendors, and attendees for another successful workshop. The 2025 Underground School is tentatively scheduled for June in Norfolk.

Utilities Section members only

Do you have equipment to sell or a position to fill? Place your ad in the Classifieds section of the *Utilities Section Newsletter* and on our website for free. This service is a

membership benefit.

Contact Brenda at the League office at 402-476-2829, fax to 402-476-7052, or email your ad to brendah@lonm.org.

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Classifieds

City Superintendent. The City of Grant is seeking a City Superintendent. Grant is a second-class city with a population of 1,197 and is located in western Nebraska. Our community is a short distance from Interstate 80, which is 18 miles north of Grant, and has well maintained highways to gain access to our community. Our community has an outstanding health care facility, a business district that wants to see continued growth, and an excellent school system. If you like the outdoors the community has a golf course, a beautiful park with amenities for all

ages, and we are also only a short distance away from Nebraska's largest lake, Lake McConaughy, (within 25 miles). The City of Grant is looking for an individual to fill the City Superintendent position, which is an administrative position to coordinate and meet the goals and objectives established by the Mayor, Grant City Council, various boards, and committees. A Bachelor's Degree in Public Administration or a related field is preferred but not required. Strong knowledge of governmental accounting, budgeting, planning, and management is required.



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Classifieds

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address: City of Grant, PO Box 614, Grant, NE 69140, (308) 352-2100, treas@grantnebraska.com. A job description and additional information are available by contacting City Clerk/Treasurer, Jessie Faber, at the above telephone number or email. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. Grant is an EOE.

Public Works Superintendent. The Village of Pender, Nebraska, located in Northeast corner of Nebraska is seeking to fill the position of Superintendent of Utilities. Pender is a progressive community located approximately 40 minutes Southwest of Sioux City, Iowa, approximately 45 minutes east of Norfolk, NE and 90 minutes North of Omaha. The population of Pender is 1,273 and is the County seat for Thurston County, Nebraska. Salary: \$50,000 - \$73,000 annually dependent on qualifications, paid bi-weekly. Benefit packages which include health, dental, vision, HSA (up to \$1,600/yr), life, vacation, 11 holidays, retirement benefits matching up to 3%. The Village of Pender is looking for someone who has a broad range of Utility experience to become the Superintendent of Utilities. The preferred candidate would have at least five years or more previous experience as a superintendent or supervisor relating to the construction, repair, maintenance and operation of the following utility departments: 1. Electric Generation, Transmission and Distribution system; 2. Water Treatment Plant and Water Distribution; 3. Sewer Treatment Plant and Sewer Line Maintenance; 4. Natural Gas Operations; and 5. Street

and Various Other Departments. The applicant should demonstrate experience with overseeing personnel, time management, and workflow of the various Village departments. The applicant must be able to file mandatory reports, learn and understand the budget. In addition to at least five years of previous electrical experience, the candidate should either have or demonstrate the ability to obtain the necessary licenses, certificates or qualifications to operate the Water, Sewer and Natural gas departments. The applicant must live within 15 miles of the municipality. Interested people may obtain an application at the Village Office, 614 Main Street, Pender, Nebraska, 68047. Or for further information contact the Village Clerk at 402-385-3232, or email clerk@villageofpender.com. EOE. Position is open until filled.

Line Technician. The City of Auburn of Board of Public Works is accepting applications for an Electric Line Technician. Qualifications include successful completion of an accredited Journeyman Lineman program or consideration for a documented Journeyman Lineman through verifiable experience. Lineman apprentice applications will be accepted. Experience in construction, installation, maintenance and repair of electric transmission and distribution lines. Knowledgeable of and ability to train in electrical distribution and transmission line construction, electrical apparatus such as single-phase transformers, three phase transformer banks, voltage testing, rotation and regulators and line switching clearance procedures and grounding. Compliance with all safety policies and procedures.



Valid CDL or ability to obtain an acceptable driving record. Candidates will be subject to a criminal background check. Successfully pass DOT physicals/drug tests as required. Ability to work outdoors in all types of weather conditions. Must reside within 30 miles of Service Center at 1604 O Street, Auburn, NE. The starting pay rate for this position is \$32.24 - \$37.78 per hour depending on experience. Job description is available upon request. Applications are available at auburnbpw.com. Return to: Board of Public Works at 1600 O Street, Auburn, NE 68305. For questions about the position contact Kevin Kuhlmann or Ray Luhning at (402)-274-4981. Position will remain open until filled.

Electric Meter Conferences scheduled

Future dates for Electric Meter Conferences have been scheduled and contracts signed with the Kearney Holiday Inn.

- Feb. 11-12, 2025
- Feb. 3-4, 2026
- Feb. 9-10, 2027
- Feb. 8-9, 2028

Understanding Fatbergs: A Utility Worker’s Guide to Combatting Sewer Blockages

Fatbergs are large, solidified masses of fats, oils, grease (FOG), and non-biodegradable materials like wet wipes and hygiene products that congeal in sewer systems. These blockages form when FOG is improperly disposed of into drains, cooling and solidifying in the pipes, binding with foreign materials that should never enter the wastewater system. Over time, these masses grow, creating dense, rock-like obstructions that can span entire sections of sewer lines.

The rise in fatbergs is driven by several factors. Increased

urbanization means more concentrated wastewater flows, and the widespread use of so-called “flushable” products exacerbates the issue. Many sewer systems are aging, with older pipes more prone to grease buildup and clogging. Seasonal changes, particularly in colder months, also contribute as lower temperatures help solidify fats in the sewer system. Areas with a high concentration of food establishments, like restaurants and food processing facilities, are particularly prone to fatberg formation due to large volumes of

FOG entering the system.

The damage caused by fatbergs is significant. They obstruct sewer lines, reducing flow capacity and leading to backups and overflows, resulting in environmental contamination and public health risks. Prolonged blockages can also compromise the structural integrity of pipes, leading to collapses that require costly repairs. Additionally, fatbergs increase the maintenance demands on pump stations, as debris-laden wastewater can damage equipment and require

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2024-2025 Training calendar

Visit our [website](#) for a complete list of workshops and conferences.

December

- Dec. 10 [Water Operator Training Workshop](#) Wastewater Training Room, Lincoln
- Dec. 12 [Water Operator Training Workshop](#) SCC Learning Center, Falls City

January

- Jan. 8-10..... Utilities/Public Works Section Annual Conference Graduate Hotel, Lincoln
- Jan. 15 Water Operator Training Workshop Blair
- Jan. 16 Water Operator Training Workshop Nebraska City
- Jan. 21 Water Operator Training Workshop Holiday Inn, Kearney
- Jan. 22-23..... Snowball Conference Holiday Inn, Kearney

February

- Feb. 11-12 Electric Meter Conference Holiday Inn, Kearney
- Feb. 24-25 Midwinter Conference..... Cornhusker Marriott Hotel, Lincoln

Understanding Fatbergs

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frequent cleaning.

Removing fatbergs is labor-intensive and hazardous. Crews typically use high-pressure jetting to break up the mass and vacuum trucks to extract debris. In severe cases, manual removal is necessary, requiring workers to physically cut away the obstruction. Robotic cutters and CCTV cameras are

increasingly used to streamline the process, but the sheer size of some blockages can still require weeks of effort.

Prevention remains the most effective strategy. Utility workers play a key role in identifying problem areas and monitoring flow rates, and measures like installing grease traps, enforcing FOG disposal regulations, and public

education can help. Advancements in technology, like sewer sensors, allow utilities to monitor flow, temperature, and FOG buildup in real time, helping detect early signs of fatbergs and address them before they become severe. This proactive approach optimizes maintenance efforts, reduces manual labor, and helps keep systems running smoothly.

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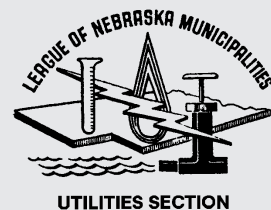
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