

# RPU Plugged In



## ADDRESSING CUSTOMER QUESTIONS

- Answering Questions from Our Customer Survey
- Learn More about the Home Energy Report
- Community Education Classes Available
- Do Ceiling Fans Save Energy?

# Answering Questions from Our Customer Survey

**E**ach quarter, RPU has a third-party company send out surveys to a random sampling of residential customers for their feedback. When we receive the survey results and comments back, we try to address all of the concerns and issues that we can. Here are some of the comments that we received along with our answers.



**What does RPU have in place to help customers learn about solar energy?**

**A:** RPU has a solar rebate program, which offers customers guidance and information from an energy professional, along with a rebate offering of \$1 per installed watt (while funds last). RPU also hosts Community Education classes on solar energy for people to learn and ask questions in a small group setting. The next class will be held on Saturday, October 5. Sign up on the RPU website. Space is limited!



**Why have I experienced more power outages this year?**

**A:** Weather plays a big factor in power outages. Sections of the electric system are exposed to the elements and trees. According to our outage records, this year is trending slightly higher than last year.

You can help minimize the outages by ensuring that your trees are trimmed away from overhead lines. A simple wind gust can push a tree limb into a line and cause an electric fault, which can affect hundreds of customers. Call RPU at **507.280.1500** if you see trees or branches that could be possible hazards.



**Should I be concerned about electric reliability and the closing of the Silver Lake Plant?**

**A:** No. RPU purchases its energy from a wholesale provider and from the Midwest Independent System Operators (MISO) market. RPU has infrastructure in place to receive the purchased power and is currently a participant in the CapX 2020 transmission project to increase the electric transmission system in the Rochester area. The Silver Lake Plant will cease all coal burning and electric generation by December 31, 2015, but will continue to provide steam to the Mayo Clinic through the burning of natural gas.



**My bill has gone up and I haven't changed how I use electricity and water. Why am I paying more?**

**A:** RPU hasn't raised electric rates in four years and water rates in six years. RPU does, however, collect the storm water and waste water fees for the city of Rochester even though they are **NOT** RPU fees. These fees did go up in 2013. Contact Rochester Public Works to get more information on the fees at [www.rochestermn.gov](http://www.rochestermn.gov) or **507.328.2400**.



**Why do I have to pay a customer charge?**

**A:** The customer charge is for the administrative costs for providing electricity and water, as well as for the infrastructure costs to get the service to all customers in Rochester. Whether you use minimal electricity and water or a lot, it still requires the same infrastructure and services, which fall under the customer charge. Each service has its own customer charge.

## Did You Know?

**RPU hasn't raised electric rates in four years and water rates in six years.**



If you have received and taken a customer satisfaction survey from RPU, thank you for your time. We have appreciated hearing that many of our customers are very satisfied with their services from RPU and we are working diligently to answer and address all of the concerns that you shared with us as well.



#### How can I lower my bill?

**A:** RPU rates haven't gone up, but the storm water and waste water fees collected by RPU for the city of Rochester have. To look into lowering your bill, first take a look at your usage. It could be that your phantom load is larger than it needs to be.

- Use a power strip to ensure that everything is shut down when not in use.
- Turn your air conditioning off and just use fans intermittently.
- Lighting is a big electrical user, so reduce the amount of lighting you need or use more efficient lighting options such as LEDs (light emitting diodes).

Remember RPU offers rebates on energy efficient equipment and light. Consider having an energy audit done of your home to identify other areas to increase efficiency. Refer to the "Your Home" section of the RPU website to learn more about energy audits and how to sign up.



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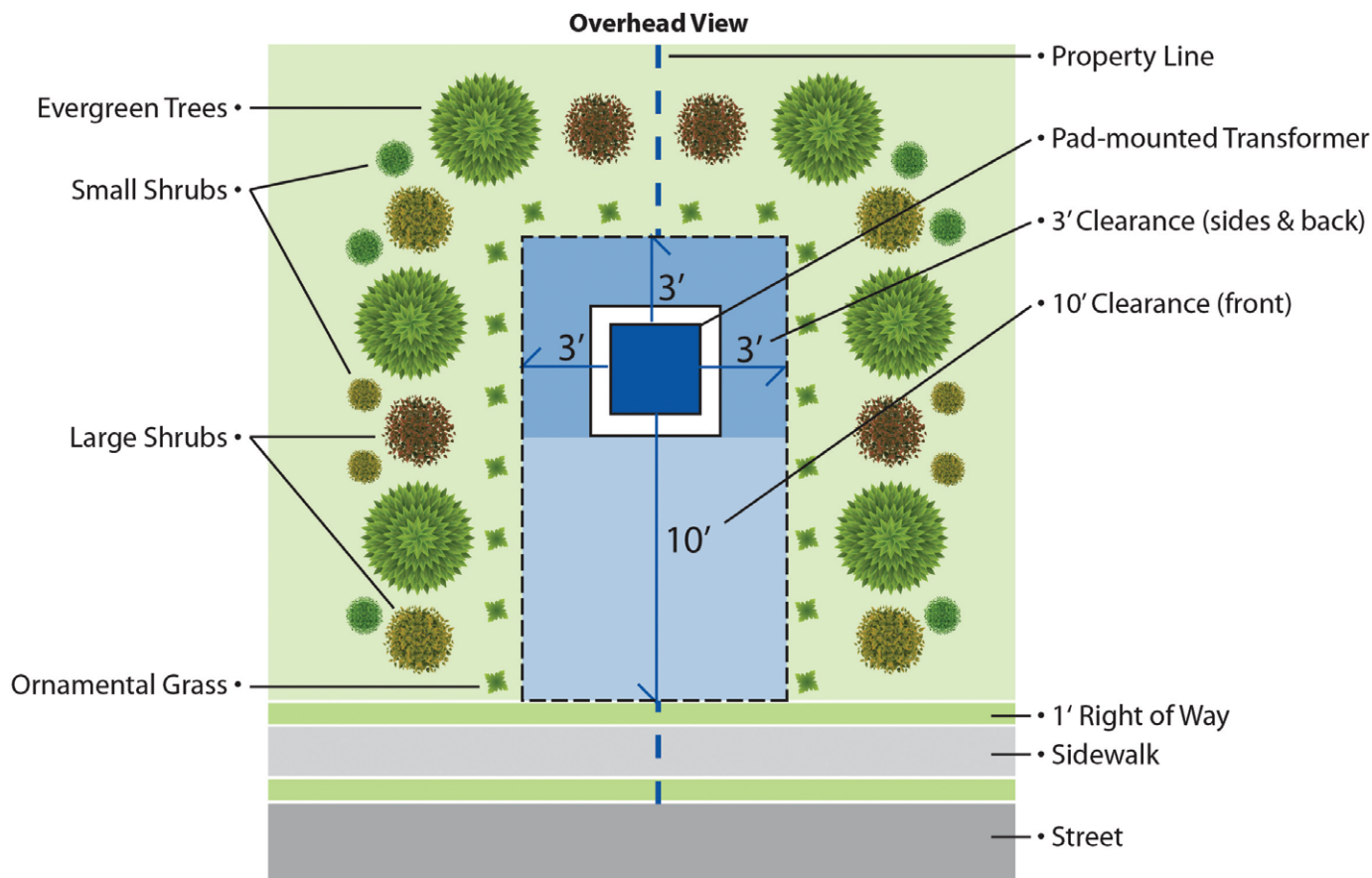
#### Why does my tap water sometimes look discolored and/or smell?

**A:** Water from your household tap is your most reliable source for drinking water. However, sometimes old household pipes can be a factor in how your water looks and tastes. In this case, running your drinking water supply until you get fresh, cold water may help.

RPU chlorinates your water supply to prevent bacteria growth. If you don't care for the chlorine taste or smell, it can be removed from the drinking water by simply putting a jug of drinking water in the refrigerator. The chlorine will usually dissipate within 24 hours. Natural iron (rust), builds up in the distribution mains over a period of time.

RPU regularly flushes fire hydrants to remove these natural iron deposits from distribution mains. Natural iron can affect how the water looks and tastes for a short time during and after flushing. Prior to flushing hydrants, RPU will try to contact affected customers. RPU also posts maps on the RPU website on a regular basis so you can what areas in the City are being flushed.

# Planting Near Pad-Mounted Transformers



People prefer underground electric lines in their neighborhood. Pad-mounted transformers are part of the underground system. They are placed on easements in yards and serve the same purpose as transformers on utility poles. Because transformers may serve several homes, underground lines may go out from them in many directions.

## HERE ARE GUIDELINES TO REMEMBER WHEN YOU PLANT NEAR TRANSFORMERS:

- 1. Contact Gopher State One Call before you dig anywhere in your yard!** They locate and mark underground utility services for you. Call (800) 252-1166 or submit an e-ticket at [www.gopherstateonecall.org](http://www.gopherstateonecall.org).
- 2. Maintain a 3-foot clearance to the sides and back of the transformer.** Equipment inside the box generates heat and needs air circulation to keep cool and run efficiently. Overheating could cause an outage.
- 3. Maintain a 10-foot clearance in front of the transformer.** Equipment inside is energized at high voltage. Line crews work on "energized" transformers to avoid interrupting your service. The linemen use long fiberglass (insulating) sticks and need the clear space to work safely.
- 4. Use gravel, wood chips, grass or low ground cover around the transformer.** Flowers are okay but may get trampled if we have to work on it. To maintain reliable service, we check and service transformers on a regular basis.



For more information  
or to apply for energy  
assistance, please contact:

Three Rivers Community Action  
**1.800.277.8418**  
[www.threeriverscap.org](http://www.threeriverscap.org)

# It's Not Too Early to Start Thinking about Cold Weather Protection

## What You Should Know about the Cold Weather Law and Winter Bills

**R**PU's objective is to ensure that residential customer accounts are protected during the cold weather period and follow the requirements of Minnesota Statute 216B.097.

Minnesota Statute 216B.097 states that a municipal utility must not disconnect and must reconnect the utility service of a residential customer during the period between October 15 and April 15 if the disconnection affects the primary heat source for the residential unit and all of the following conditions are met:

- 1)** the household income is at or below 50 percent of the state median income. RPU may verify income on forms it provides or obtain verification of income from the local energy assistance provider. A customer is deemed to meet the income requirements of this clause if the customer receives any form of public assistance, including energy assistance, that uses an income eligibility threshold set at or below 50 percent of the state median household income;
- 2)** the customer enters into and makes reasonably timely payments under a payment agreement that considers the financial resources of the household. "Reasonably timely payment" means payment within five working days of agreed-upon due dates;

- 3)** the customer receives referrals to energy assistance, weatherization, conservation, or other programs likely to reduce the customer's energy bills.

Applications are required for winter disconnection protection. Before disconnecting service to a residential customer during the period between October 15 and April 15, RPU will provide the following information to the customer:

- 1)** a notice of proposed disconnection;
- 2)** a statement explaining the customer's rights and responsibilities;
- 3)** a list of local energy assistance providers;
- 4)** a form on which to declare inability to pay; and
- 5)** a statement explaining available time payment plans and other opportunities to secure continued utility service.

### Energy Assistance

Three Rivers Community Action

**800.277.8418**

[www.threeriverscap.org](http://www.threeriverscap.org)



# Learn More about the Home Energy Report

**T**he Home Energy Report has been a successful program for RPU for more than three years in a row by facilitating more than 14 million kilowatt-hours of energy savings. But through customer feedback channels, we are still hearing that there may be some questions or confusion about the program. Here are some FAQs to hopefully help you down your path of energy efficiency in your home!

## Q: Why do I get a Home Energy Report?

**A:** Rochester Public Utilities' Home Energy Reports program is designed to provide you with more information about your energy use, so that you can make informed choices and save money on your energy bill. Each report helps you put your energy use in the context of the energy use of similar homes in your area. Reports also include tips for saving energy, chosen for you based on what we know about your home.

## Q: How often are Home Energy Reports sent?

**A:** We want to provide you with regular updates about your energy use, so Home Energy Reports are sent every two months. We have found that we can help our customers save energy and money more cost-effectively by sending reports every two months instead of every month.

## Q: Who are my neighbors?

**A:** The neighbors you're compared to on your Home Energy Report are not necessarily your actual geographic neighbors. The report compares your energy use with around 100 homes in your area with similar characteristics as yours, including home size, heating type, and whether you are in a single-family or multi-family home. Your "efficient neighbors" are the 20 most efficient of the 100 homes in your neighbor comparison.

## Q: Isn't this a waste of paper/money/postage/resources?

**A:** We send these reports because they've been proven to save customers energy and money. In general, we've seen that for every dollar spent on the Home Energy Reports program, customers save three dollars. Our research shows that we can help the most people save the most energy by sending reports through the mail. However, if you would rather receive these reports via email, contact us at **507.280.1500** or [energyreports@rpu.org](mailto:energyreports@rpu.org) and we can switch you over to email reports.



## Q: I think I'm already efficient – why do reports tell me I'm so much less efficient than my neighbors?

**A:** We build these neighbor comparisons based on what we know about your home. It could be that we don't have the right size, heating type, or dwelling type for your home. If you would like to make sure we're comparing you correctly, you can call **507.280.1500** or email us at [energyreports@rpu.org](mailto:energyreports@rpu.org) and we can update your home profile to make sure you get the most accurate comparison. You can also change your home profile yourself at <http://energyreports.rpu.org>. All updates to your home profile are confidential and are only used for your Home Energy Report.

## Q: Are you sharing my usage information with my neighbors?

**A:** We are not sharing your usage information with anyone other than you. All data in Home Energy Reports are kept completely anonymous. The comparison is an average of 100 similar homes in your area.

## Q: Can I opt out of this program?

**A:** Yes, you can. Contact us at **507.280.1500** or [energyreports@rpu.org](mailto:energyreports@rpu.org) and we can remove you from the Home Energy Reports program.

# Fall Community Education Classes Hosted By RPU

## 2013 Community Education Classes

**G**ain a better knowledge on geothermal and solar by attending the RPU sponsored Community Education classes being offered this fall. Great for the advanced homeowner looking to further their energy efficiency or for the beginner just dipping their toes in to learn the basics. Sign up today because space is limited!

### Solar Energy for Your Home or Business

An overview of solar electric and solar heating systems will be presented. There will be many photos of solar installations so that you can get a good idea of what they look like and how they are installed. Many basic questions will be addressed such as: How well does solar energy work in Minnesota? How much energy do the systems produce? What are the costs involved and overall economics? What incentives are available? Is there any maintenance? There will be plenty of time for questions and discussion.

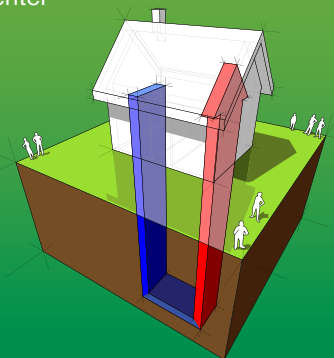
**Instructor:** Micah Johnson  
**Date:** Saturday, October 5, 2013  
**Time:** 10 a.m.-12 p.m.  
**Session(s):** 1  
**Location:** Cascade Meadow & Environmental Science Center



### Residential Geothermal Heating and Cooling

Whether you are building a new home or considering a new heating and cooling system for your present one, consider the economic and environmental advantages of geothermal technology. It is the world's most advanced, most cost-effective heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system for new or existing homes. This class will provide you with geothermal basics: what it does and how it works. Geothermal heating and cooling systems can provide greater comfort and energy savings. Find out information on federal tax credits and Rochester Public Utilities' installation incentives.

**Instructor:** Arnie Lorimor  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 22, 2013  
**Time:** 6:30- 8:30 p.m.  
**Session(s):** 1  
**Location:** Cascade Meadow & Environmental Science Center







4000 East River Road NE  
Rochester, MN 55906  
**507.280.1500**  
[www.rpu.org](http://www.rpu.org)

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### RPU Service Center Holiday Hours

The RPU Service Center will be closed  
the following days.

**Monday, September 2 in  
observance of Labor Day.**



## Do Ceiling Fans Save Energy?

**Y**es, ceiling fans can help  
save energy – but only in  
the summer.

A ceiling fan during hot, sticky  
days creates a wind chill effect  
that will make you feel more  
comfortable in your home, even if  
it's also cooled by natural ventila-  
tion or air conditioning. If you use  
air conditioning, a ceiling fan will  
allow you to raise the thermostat  
setting about 4 degrees with no  
reduction in comfort. In temperate  
climates, or during moderately hot  
weather, ceiling fans may allow you  
to avoid using your air conditioner  
altogether. A ceiling fan is recom-  
mended in each room that needs  
to be cooled during hot weather.  
Ceiling fans should be turned off  
when you leave a room; fans cool  
people, not rooms, through the  
wind chill effect.

Ceiling fans are only appropriate in  
rooms with ceilings at least eight  
feet high. Fans work best when  
the blades are 7-9 feet above the  
floor and 10-12 inches below the  
ceiling. Fans should be installed  
so their blades are no closer than  
8 inches from the ceiling and 18  
inches from walls.

In the winter months, ceiling  
fans will not reduce your heating  
costs, because the movement of  
air currents will cool our bodies  
slightly. This cooling effect may  
prompt residents to unnecessarily  
raise their thermostat and overheat  
their homes.

For more on the use of fans to  
cool one's home, visit the U.S.  
Department of Energy website  
at [www.energy.gov](http://www.energy.gov).

Courtesy of the Minnesota Department  
of Commerce and the U.S. Department  
of Energy.