

**DECISION**

**BEFORE THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF THE  
MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**WILLIAM GRANT, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER**

**Decision**

In the Matter of Determining Normal Maintenance Activities  
and CIP Review Process for Electric Utility Infrastructure Projects

**Issue Date:** October 22, 2018

**Docket No.** E999/CIP-18-543

**I. PROCEDURAL HISTORY**

On August 22, 2018, Staff of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources (Staff) filed a Proposal Filing (Proposal) detailing proposed guidance concerning the utility requirements of Minnesota Statutes section 216B.241 subdivision 1c(d), and how electric utility infrastructure projects “must result in increased energy efficiency greater than that which would have occurred through normal maintenance activity.”

On September 6, 2018, Xcel Energy and Minnesota Power filed comments on the policy guidance described in the Proposal.

No reply comments were submitted by interested parties.

## Table of Contents

<b>I. PROCEDURAL HISTORY</b> .....	1
<b>II. BACKGROUND</b> .....	1
<b>III. DETERMINING NORMAL MAINTENANCE</b> .....	1
Normal Maintenance Criteria .....	2
<b>IV. ESTABLISHING A BASELINE FOR ENERGY SAVINGS ESTIMATION</b> .....	3
Additional Guidance.....	3
Special Generation Case .....	4
<b>V. EUI PROJECT REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS</b> .....	4
Step 1 – Develop EUI Project Outline .....	4
Step 2 – Determine Normal Maintenance for the Existing Equipment .....	4
Step 3 – Define <i>Beyond</i> Normal Maintenance for the Proposed EUI Efficiency Project .....	4
Step 4 – Submit Initial Proposed EUI Project Information to Commerce.....	5
Step 5 – Determine Proposed Energy Savings Methodology .....	5
Step 6 – Estimate EUI Energy Savings .....	5
Step 7 – Implement EUI Project and Claim CIP Credit .....	6
<b>VI. STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS</b> .....	6
<b>VII. DECISION</b> .....	7
Appendix: EUI Project Examples .....	8

## **II. BACKGROUND**

Minnesota statute §216B.241 subd. 1c(d) allows utilities to include energy savings from electric utility infrastructure (EUI) projects toward their Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) goals, provided the projects achieve greater efficiency than would otherwise be implemented in the course of “normal maintenance” activity. However, determining what should be considered “normal maintenance” is not clearly distinguished by the statute, resulting in uncertain savings calculations and making it difficult for utilities to assess the value of infrastructure efficiency options.

The Minnesota Department of Commerce (Department), GDS Associates, and Center for Energy and Environment received a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to conduct an EUI stakeholder process to better understand existing state policies concerning EUI, examine incentives/disincentives to improving EUI efficiency, and recommend policy changes or clarifications to leverage EUI efficiency to help meet Minnesota’s energy savings goals.<sup>1</sup> Stakeholders participating in the DOE project specifically raised the problem of determining “normal maintenance” as an important barrier to implementation of EUI efficiency projects.

On August 22, 2018, Staff of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources (Staff) filed a Proposal Filing (Proposal) in order to provide utilities with more formal guidance regarding how to determine EUI “normal maintenance” activities, so that there is more consistency and clarity regarding its interpretation.

The Approved Policy Guidance (Guidance) detailed below, provides the Deputy Commissioner’s determinations on Staff’s Proposal. The Guidance approves: 1) Screening criteria to help determine “normal maintenance” activities, 2) guidance for determining an EUI project’s energy use baseline, and 3) a step-by-step process to help standardize how EUI projects are reviewed and approved for CIP energy savings credit.

## **III. DETERMINING NORMAL MAINTENANCE**

The following guidance related to determining “normal maintenance” is meant to 1) establish a threshold for screening EUI efficiency projects that are eligible versus ineligible for CIP credit, and 2) determine an appropriate energy use baseline to be used for energy savings calculations.

Once “normal maintenance” is determined for a facility or equipment, actions that result in efficiency greater than that threshold are considered “beyond normal maintenance” and are eligible to claim CIP credit. Conversely, actions that are considered “normal maintenance” are not eligible for CIP credit.

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<sup>1</sup> Link to project website: <https://www.mncee.org/mnsupplystudy/about/>

“Normal maintenance” will be defined differently for projects depending on the specific equipment or facility under consideration and the proposed efficiency improvements. Due to the wide variety of EUI equipment or facilities that could possibly claim conservation credit, the determination of “normal maintenance” is impossible to definitively prescribe for all use cases in advance.

This Guidance should be thought of as a guideline for improving understanding of “normal maintenance,” to anticipate common issues that are likely to arise, and reduce uncertainty while planning EUI efficiency projects. It is highly recommended that utilities submit all projects to Commerce for review early in the planning process to ensure the proposed “normal maintenance” determination is appropriate for the specific project.

### **Normal Maintenance Criteria**

For CIP purposes, “normal maintenance” is defined as actions that do not change or alter the fundamental design or nature of the affected facility<sup>2</sup> or equipment, and meet at least one of the following criteria:

#### Modifying existing equipment or facility

- Actions required to allow the facility or equipment to operate as designed.
- Actions recommended by the equipment manufacturer as maintenance.
- Actions actually performed periodically on the facility or equipment with historical documentation of the actions for at least three maintenance cycles.
- Actions called for under an established maintenance protocol. Protocol must be documented and have been in effect for at least one quarter of the expected lifetime of the equipment prior to the efficiency project.
- Actions that meet the definition of maintenance as prescribed in the applicable Technical Reference Manual EUI measure.<sup>3</sup>

#### Replacing equipment

- Actions to install new equipment that meets efficiency requirements of current applicable codes or standards.
- Actions to replace equipment according to an established internal protocol. Protocol must be documented and have been in effect for at least one quarter of the expected lifetime of the equipment prior to the efficiency project.
- Actions to replace equipment following a historical pattern of similar replacements.
- Actions that meet the definition of the baseline case for equipment replacement as prescribed in the applicable Technical Reference Manual EUI measure.

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<sup>2</sup> Language from a 1991 court case concerning the definition of maintenance for New Source Review purposes. Seventh Circuit of Appeals WEPCo vs. Reilly.

<sup>3</sup> “Minnesota TRM Webpage”: <https://mn.gov/commerce/industries/energy/utilities/cip/technical-reference-manual/>

#### **IV. ESTABLISHING A BASELINE FOR ENERGY SAVINGS ESTIMATION**

Once “normal maintenance” is determined for a facility or equipment, actions that result in efficiency greater than that threshold are considered “beyond normal maintenance” and are eligible to claim CIP credit.

To establish a baseline for estimating energy savings, a proposed EUI efficiency project should be compared to the scenario defined as “normal maintenance” to calculate conservation credit, where the savings are calculated by determining the difference between the two scenarios.

The methodology used to compare the scenarios to calculate savings will depend on the type of project proposed. For example, several types of EUI projects can use methodologies defined in the Minnesota Technical Reference Manual.<sup>4</sup> For projects where more than one of the preceding descriptions apply, the description that produces the most efficient baseline (and highest threshold for eligibility) should be used for CIP purposes.

**In all cases, the baseline used for energy savings calculations is ultimately subject to approval by Commerce. Applying the “normal maintenance” guidance to determine baseline conditions means that in some cases existing equipment in the existing condition does not constitute the appropriate baseline for calculating CIP energy savings.**

In many cases, the actual long-term historical performance of equipment will constitute an appropriate baseline under the assumption that the equipment has been appropriately maintained. That is, actual maintenance normally undertaken will often define “normal maintenance” for CIP purposes. Even for projects where this is the case, the baseline must be reviewed and approved before it is verified as eligible.

#### **Additional Guidance**

If “normal maintenance” activity is still not clearly understood using the guidance definition above, conservation calculations can use the original design specifications of the equipment as the baseline. In this case, even if the equipment has degraded to be inefficient, improvements only count that increase efficiency beyond the equipment’s originally-designed operating conditions. This strategy depends on a clearly defined original design when the equipment was installed or most recently upgraded. This method should only be used in cases where:

1. Normal maintenance is not reasonably defined per the above guidance
2. The original design conditions are obviously identifiable

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<sup>4</sup> “Minnesota TRM Webpage”: <https://mn.gov/commerce/industries/energy/utilities/cip/technical-reference-manual/>

## **Special Generation Case**

If a proposed action triggers a New Source Review (NSR) for an existing facility, the upgrades can be claimed toward CIP energy savings goals because they have already been deemed beyond the course of normal maintenance under the broader definition of maintenance used by the EPA for NSR purposes.

## **V. EUI PROJECT REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS**

For a proposed EUI efficiency project, “normal maintenance” activity must be well understood to establish an eligibility threshold and to determine baseline conditions to calculate energy savings. Having these parameters appropriately defined will help ensure that the EUI efficiency project will be eligible for CIP credit.

The following step-by-step process outlines the EUI project information that utilities should submit to Commerce for review and approval. It is recommended that the utilities communicate with Commerce’s CIP Staff during this review/approval process to help ensure that the proposed EUI project will be eligible for CIP energy savings credit.

### **Step 1 – Develop EUI Project Outline**

Develop a narrative summary description of the EUI project that addresses:

- *Who*: The name of the utility that intends to claim energy savings from the EUI project.
- *What*: A general description of the EUI efficiency project and the existing equipment that it is modifying or replacing.
- *Where*: The location of the EUI project.
- *Why*: How the EUI project will save energy.
- *When*: The general schedule for implementation, including which year the utility intends to claim the resulting CIP savings for.
- *How*: How the baseline consumption and efficient equipment consumption will be tracked and measured.

### **Step 2 – Determine Normal Maintenance for the Existing Equipment**

Referencing [the guidance above](#), develop a summary description of “normal maintenance” action(s) for the existing equipment.

### **Step 3 – Define *Beyond Normal Maintenance* for the Proposed EUI Efficiency Project**

Develop a summary justification about how the proposed EUI efficiency project would exceed the determined “normal maintenance” actions for the system or facility, and include a description of the proposed baseline for calculating the EUI project’s energy savings.

#### **Step 4 – Submit Initial Proposed EUI Project Information to Commerce**

Submit the Project Outline, Normal Maintenance Description, and Beyond Normal Maintenance Justification (i.e. outlined in Steps 1-3) to Commerce CIP Staff for their preliminary review.

Commerce CIP Staff will proceed to:

1. Determine whether the description of “normal maintenance” is accurate and appropriate for the proposed project.
2. Verify whether the proposed EUI project description would be considered “beyond normal maintenance.”
3. Send an email response to the utility summarizing Staff’s initial findings and recommendations, including whether or not to proceed to Steps 5-6 of the EUI project review/approval process.

#### **Step 5 – Determine Proposed Energy Savings Methodology**

Develop a proposed CIP energy savings calculation methodology. The methodology should reference the applicable TRM measure or describe a model that will be used to calculate savings.

The efficient case in the model/algorithm should describe expected operating conditions after implementing the proposed EUI project. The baseline case in the model/algorithm should describe operating conditions in the normal maintenance case (this may or may not correspond to the actual existing conditions of the system/facility).

Documentation to justify the chosen baseline case should include the following, if available:

- Standing maintenance protocol
- Manufacturer recommended maintenance guidelines
- Historic documentation of periodic actions performed at the site or on the equipment
- Any applicable energy codes or standards
- Historic documentation of similar projects
- Description what would occur at the site in the absence of the proposed project

#### **Step 6 – Estimate EUI Energy Savings**

Using the TRM or appropriate modeling tools, estimate the energy savings of the proposed EUI project. Submit the estimated energy savings to Commerce along with the methodology details from Step 5 to Commerce CIP Staff for review.

Commerce CIP Staff will proceed to:

1. Determine whether the proposed savings calculation methodology is appropriate, or if modifications are needed.
2. Review the energy savings calculations and project documentation for accuracy.

3. Send an email response to the utility summarizing Staff's findings and recommendations, including whether or not to proceed to Step 7 of the EUI project review/approval process.

### **Step 7 – Implement EUI Project and Claim CIP Credit**

Once the proposed project is complete, submit final project documentation to Commerce, including the savings methodology, description of the chosen baseline, measured data, and calculated energy savings.

Commerce Staff will then proceed to:

1. Review the final project documentation.
2. Submit an emailed response with final approval, approval with modifications, or disapproval of the EUI energy savings for CIP credit.

## **VI. STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS**

On September 6, 2018, Xcel Energy (Xcel) and Minnesota Power (MP) filed comments on the policy guidance described in the Proposal. MP's comments were supportive of the Proposal's recommended guidance and did not highlight any concerns. Xcel's comments noted some concerns with the Proposal, as stated below:

*After carefully reviewing the proposed guidance, the Company believes that, in certain instances, the criteria penalizes utilities that have already implemented efficiency upgrades that would have qualified but were not claimed, does not allow for the retrofitting or recommissioning of existing EUI equipment, and is not completely consistent with some current CIP programs and the EUI potential study.*

The Deputy Commissioner appreciates the time and effort that Xcel and MP contributed to reviewing and providing feedback on the Proposal, and looks forward to continuing to collaborate on CIP policy guidance issues going forward.

To address what seems to be Xcel's main concern, the Deputy Commissioner would like to emphasize that this guidance does not establish new requirements, per se. Rather, the purpose of this Guidance is to clarify and formalize the process for determining an appropriate definition of "normal maintenance" as a baseline for EUI efficiency projects.

The utilities are statutorily required to determine what is and is not "normal maintenance" when proposing to claim EUI energy savings toward their CIP performance. This Guidance will help reduce uncertainty and set expectations regarding the appropriate energy savings assumptions that should be used during the CIP review and approval process for EUI projects.

To confirm, as recommended by Xcel, EUI projects (including eligible retrofitting and recommissioning projects) will still be reviewed by Commerce's CIP Staff on a case-by-case basis following the step-by-step review/approval process outlined in [Section V](#), recognizing that it is



impossible to prescriptively define “normal maintenance” in a way that would cover all use cases. In such cases the Department will work closely with the utility to determine an agreeable definition of “normal maintenance” and what actions would constitute going beyond that definition. Additionally, to answer Xcel’s clarification in its comments, the CIP step-by-step review/approval process described in this Guidance should be used for all EUI projects that the utilities intend to claim CIP energy savings credit from.

**VII. DECISION**

The Deputy Commissioner approves the new guidance for determining “normal maintenance” activities and the CIP review/approval process for EUI projects. The Deputy Commissioner approves the new guidance to take effect on October 22, 2018.

*BY ORDER OF THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Grant', is positioned above the printed name.

William Grant  
Deputy Commissioner,  
Minnesota Department of Commerce,  
Division of Energy Resources

Appendix: EUI Project Examples

Proposed Project	Existing Conditions	Normal Maintenance	Conservation Eligible
Replace a coal fired generation plant with a wind farm	Coal plant	Not applicable in this case. Projects that change a generation facility's nameplate capacity, fuel type, or technology are not considered maintenance (changes the fundamental design of the facility)	The project may or may not be eligible, but "normal maintenance" is not a relevant concept (in this particular case, fuel switching must be considered)
Gas generation facility - replace furnace heat transfer surfaces, replace filters and re-optimize combustion settings	Periodically replace filters and re-optimize combustion settings per manufacturer recommendations	Periodically replace filters and re-optimize combustion settings per manufacturer recommendations	The marginal savings from replacing the heat transfer surfaces is eligible, but improvements from filter and combustion optimization are not
Inspect all transmission transformer bushings and replace failed ones	Bushing inspections performed every 10 years despite manufacture recommending every 5 years	Assume failed bushings are replaced every 5 years	Develop a method of prorating savings by adjusting the failure rate to reflect an assumed maintenance baseline
Add waste heat recovery to a substation	Substation site with no waste heat recovery	Not applicable in this case. Adding a new process is not considered maintenance	Actual conservation achieved compared to the existing conditions is eligible (requires approved calculation methodology)
Accelerate maintenance cycle at a generation facility from 12 months to 6 - achieve efficiency improvements more frequently	Complete a site-specific maintenance protocol every 12 months for the last 10 years	Assume continuation of historical completion of maintenance protocol every 12 months at the site	Marginal improvements achieved by more frequent maintenance are eligible. Requires documentation showing historical practices and newly adopted ones
Complete retrofit of existing equipment	Functioning equipment with useful life remaining, but decreasing efficiency due to wear and tear	Maintenance performed periodically on equipment, but no major retrofits	Retrofit projects <i>are</i> eligible to claim CIP credit, but are a difficult use case for maintenance purposes. Recommend careful documentation and frequent communication.

## **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I, Sharon Ferguson, hereby certify that I have this day, served copies of the following document on the attached list of persons by electronic filing, certified mail, e-mail, or by depositing a true and correct copy thereof properly enveloped with postage paid in the United States Mail at St. Paul, Minnesota.

**Minnesota Department of Commerce  
Decision**

**Docket No. E999/CIP-18-543**

**Dated this 22<sup>nd</sup> day of October 2018**

**/s/Sharon Ferguson**

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Tom	Balster	tombalster@alliantenergy.com	Interstate Power & Light Company	PO Box 351 200 1st St SE Cedar Rapids, IA 524060351	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Lisa	Beckner	lbeckner@mnpower.com	Minnesota Power	30 W Superior St  Duluth, MN 55802	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
William	Black	bblack@mmua.org	MMUA	Suite 400 3025 Harbor Lane North Plymouth, MN 554475142	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Christina	Brusven	cbrusven@fredlaw.com	Fredrikson Byron	200 S 6th St Ste 4000  Minneapolis, MN 554021425	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Charlie	Buck	charlie.buck@oracle.com	Oracle	760 Market St FL 4  San Francisco, CA 94102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Ray	Choquette	rchoquette@agp.com	Ag Processing Inc.	12700 West Dodge Road PO Box 2047 Omaha, NE 68103-2047	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Generic Notice	Commerce Attorneys	commerce.attorneys@ag.state.mn.us	Office of the Attorney General-DOC	445 Minnesota Street Suite 1800  St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
George	Crocker	gwillc@nawo.org	North American Water Office	PO Box 174  Lake Elmo, MN 55042	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Carl	Cronin	Regulatory.records@xcelenergy.com	Xcel Energy	414 Nicollet Mall FL 7  Minneapolis, MN 554011993	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Leigh	Currie	lcurrie@mncenter.org	Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy	26 E. Exchange St., Suite 206  St. Paul, Minnesota 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Ian	Dobson	residential.utilities@ag.state.mn.us	Office of the Attorney General-RUD	1400 BRM Tower 445 Minnesota St St. Paul, MN 551012130	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Steve	Downer	sdowner@mmua.org	MMUA	3025 Harbor Ln N Ste 400  Plymouth, MN 554475142	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Charles	Drayton	charles.drayton@enbridge.com	Enbridge Energy Company, Inc.	7701 France Ave S Ste 600  Edina, MN 55435	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Jim	Erchul	jerchul@dbnhs.org	Daytons Bluff Neighborhood Housing Sv.	823 E 7th St  St. Paul, MN 55106	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Greg	Ernst	gaernst@q.com	G. A. Ernst & Associates, Inc.	2377 Union Lake Trl  Northfield, MN 55057	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Melissa S	Feine	melissa.feine@semcac.org	SEMCAC	PO Box 549 204 S Elm St Rushford, MN 55971	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Sharon	Ferguson	sharon.ferguson@state.mn.us	Department of Commerce	85 7th Place E Ste 280  Saint Paul, MN 551012198	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Rob	Friend	rfriend@mnchamber.com	Minnesota Chamber of Commerce	400 Robert St N Ste 1500  Saint Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Angela E.	Gordon	angela.e.gordon@lmco.com	Lockheed Martin	1000 Clark Ave.  St. Louis, MO 63102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Pat	Green	N/A	N Energy Dev	City Hall 401 E 21st St Hibbing, MN 55746	Paper Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Jason	Grenier	jgrenier@otpc.com	Otter Tail Power Company	215 South Cascade Street Fergus Falls, MN 56537	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Stephan	Gunn	sgunn@appliedenergygroup.com	Applied Energy Group	1941 Pike Ln De Pere, WI 54115	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Jeffrey	Haase	jhaase@grenergy.com	Great River Energy	12300 Elm Creek Blvd Maple Grove, MN 55369	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Tony	Hainault	anthony.hainault@co.hennepin.mn.us	Hennepin County DES	701 4th Ave S Ste 700 Minneapolis, MN 55415-1842	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Tyler	Hamman	tylerh@bepec.com	Basin Electric Power Cooperative	1717 E Interstate Ave Bismarck, ND 58501	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Patty	Hanson	phanson@rpu.org	Rochester Public Utilities	4000 E River Rd NE Rochester, MN 55906	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Norm	Harold	N/A	NKS Consulting	5591 E 180th St Prior Lake, MN 55372	Paper Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Scott	Hautala	scotth@hpuc.com	Hibbing Public Utilities	1902 E 6th Ave Hibbing, MN 55746	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Kimberly	Hellwig	kimberly.hellwig@stoel.com	Stoel Rives LLP	33 South Sixth Street Suite 4200 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Jared	Hendricks	hendricksj@owatonnautilities.com	Owatonna Public Utilities	PO Box 800 208 S Walnut Ave Owatonna, MN 55060-2940	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Karolanne	Hoffman	kmh@dairy.net.com	Dairyland Power Cooperative	PO Box 817 La Crosse, WI 54602-0817	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Dave	Johnson	dave.johnson@aeoa.org	Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency	702 3rd Ave S Virginia, MN 55792	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Deborah	Knoll	dknoll@mnpower.com	Minnesota Power	30 W Superior St Duluth, MN 55802	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Tina	Koecher	tkoecher@mnpower.com	Minnesota Power	30 W Superior St Duluth, MN 558022093	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Kelly	Lady	kellyl@austinutilities.com	Austin Utilities	400 4th St NE Austin, MN 55912	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Erica	Larson	erica.larson@centerpointenergy.com	CenterPoint Energy	505 Nicollet Avenue P.O. Box 59038 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55459-0038	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Martin	Lepak	Martin.Lepak@aeoa.org	Arrowhead Economic Opportunity	702 S 3rd Ave Virginia, MN 55792	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Nick	Mark	nick.mark@centerpointenergy.com	CenterPoint Energy	505 Nicollet Mall Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Pam	Marshall	pam@energycents.org	Energy CENTS Coalition	823 7th St E St. Paul, MN 55106	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Scot	McClure	scotmcclure@alliantenergy.com	Interstate Power And Light Company	4902 N Biltmore Ln PO Box 77007 Madison, WI 537071007	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
John	McWilliams	jmm@dairy.net	Dairyland Power Cooperative	3200 East Ave SPO Box 817  La Crosse, WI 54601-7227	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Brian	Meloy	brian.meloy@stinson.com	Stinson, Leonard, Street LLP	50 S 6th St Ste 2600  Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
David	Moeller	dmoeller@allete.com	Minnesota Power	30 W Superior St  Duluth, MN 558022093	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Andrew	Moratzka	andrew.moratzka@stoel.com	Stoel Rives LLP	33 South Sixth St Ste 4200  Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Carl	Nelson	cnelson@mncee.org	Center for Energy and Environment	212 3rd Ave N Ste 560  Minneapolis, MN 55401	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Samantha	Norris	samanthanorris@alliantenergy.com	Interstate Power and Light Company	200 1st Street SE PO Box 351  Cedar Rapids, IA 524060351	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Matt	Okeefe	Matt.okeefe@oracle.com	Oracle	760 Market St FL 4  San Francisco, CA 94102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Audrey	Partridge	apartridge@mncee.org	Center for Energy and Environment	212 3rd Ave. N. Suite 560  Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Joyce	Peppin	joyce@mrea.org	Minnesota Rural Electric Association	11640 73rd Ave N  Maple Grove, MN 55369	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543



First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Lisa	Pickard	lseverson@minnkota.com	Minnkota Power Cooperative	5301 32nd Ave S Grand Forks, ND 58201	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Bill	Poppert	info@technologycos.com	Technology North	2433 Highwood Ave St. Paul, MN 55119	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Kathleen A	Prestidge	Kathy.Prestidge@stoel.com	Stoel Rives LLP	33 S 6th St Ste 4200 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Dave	Reinke	dreinke@dakotaelectric.com	Dakota Electric Association	4300 220th St W Farmington, MN 55024-9583	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Chris	Rustad	crustad@mnchamber.com	Minnesota Chamber of Commerce	400 Robert St N Ste 1500 Saint Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Christopher	Schoenherr	cp.schoenherr@smmpa.org	SMMPA	500 First Ave SW Rochester, MN 55902-3303	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Lauryn	Schothorst	lschothorst@mnchamber.com		400 Robert St N Ste 1500 Saint Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Ken	Smith	ken.smith@districtenergy.com	District Energy St. Paul Inc.	76 W Kellogg Blvd St. Paul, MN 55102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Anna	Sommer	anna@sommerenergy.com	Sommer Energy LLC	PO Box 766 Grand Canyon, AZ 86023	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Russ	Stark	Russ.Stark@ci.stpaul.mn.us	City of St. Paul	390 City Hall 15 West Kellogg Boulevard Saint Paul, MN 55102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Kodi	Verhalen	kverhalen@briggs.com	Briggs & Morgan	2200 IDS Center 80 South Eighth Street Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Michael	Volker	mvolker@eastriver.coop	East River Electric Power Coop	211 S. Harth Ave  Madison, SD 57042	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Sharon N.	Walsh	swalsh@shakopeeutilities.com	Shakopee Public Utilities	255 Sarazin St  Shakopee, MN 55379	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Ethan	Warner	ethan.warner@centerpointenergy.com	CenterPoint Energy	505 Nicollet Mall  Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Robyn	Woeste	robynwoeste@alliantenergy.com	Interstate Power and Light Company	200 First St SE  Cedar Rapids, IA 52401	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543
Daniel P	Wolf	dan.wolf@state.mn.us	Public Utilities Commission	121 7th Place East Suite 350 St. Paul, MN 551012147	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_18-543_CIP-18-543

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Tom	Balster	tombalster@alliantenergy.com	Interstate Power & Light Company	PO Box 351 200 1st St SE Cedar Rapids, IA 524060351	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Lisa	Beckner	lbeckner@mnpower.com	Minnesota Power	30 W Superior St  Duluth, MN 55802	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
William	Black	bblack@mmua.org	MMUA	Suite 400 3025 Harbor Lane North Plymouth, MN 554475142	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Christina	Brusven	cbrusven@fredlaw.com	Fredrikson Byron	200 S 6th St Ste 4000  Minneapolis, MN 554021425	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Charlie	Buck	charlie.buck@oracle.com	Oracle	760 Market St FL 4  San Francisco, CA 94102	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Ray	Choquette	rchoquette@agp.com	Ag Processing Inc.	12700 West Dodge Road PO Box 2047 Omaha, NE 68103-2047	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Generic Notice	Commerce Attorneys	commerce.attorneys@ag.state.mn.us	Office of the Attorney General-DOC	445 Minnesota Street Suite 1800  St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
George	Crocker	gwillc@nawo.org	North American Water Office	PO Box 174  Lake Elmo, MN 55042	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Carl	Cronin	Regulatory.records@xcelenergy.com	Xcel Energy	414 Nicollet Mall FL 7  Minneapolis, MN 554011993	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Leigh	Currie	lcurrie@mncenter.org	Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy	26 E. Exchange St., Suite 206  St. Paul, Minnesota 55101	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST

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Ian	Dobson	residential.utilities@ag.state.mn.us	Office of the Attorney General-RUD	1400 BRM Tower 445 Minnesota St St. Paul, MN 551012130	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Steve	Downer	sdowner@mmua.org	MMUA	3025 Harbor Ln N Ste 400  Plymouth, MN 554475142	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Charles	Drayton	charles.drayton@enbridge.com	Enbridge Energy Company, Inc.	7701 France Ave S Ste 600  Edina, MN 55435	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Jim	Erchul	jerchul@dbnhs.org	Daytons Bluff Neighborhood Housing Sv.	823 E 7th St  St. Paul, MN 55106	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Greg	Ernst	gaernst@q.com	G. A. Ernst & Associates, Inc.	2377 Union Lake Trl  Northfield, MN 55057	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Melissa S	Feine	melissa.feine@semcac.org	SEMCAC	PO Box 549 204 S Elm St Rushford, MN 55971	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Sharon	Ferguson	sharon.ferguson@state.mn.us	Department of Commerce	85 7th Place E Ste 280  Saint Paul, MN 551012198	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Rob	Friend	rfriend@mnchamber.com	Minnesota Chamber of Commerce	400 Robert St N Ste 1500  Saint Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Angela E.	Gordon	angela.e.gordon@lmco.com	Lockheed Martin	1000 Clark Ave.  St. Louis, MO 63102	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Pat	Green	N/A	N Energy Dev	City Hall 401 E 21st St Hibbing, MN 55746	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST

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Jason	Grenier	jgrenier@otpc.com	Otter Tail Power Company	215 South Cascade Street Fergus Falls, MN 56537	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Stephan	Gunn	sgunn@appliedenergygroup.com	Applied Energy Group	1941 Pike Ln De Pere, WI 54115	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Jeffrey	Haase	jhaase@grenergy.com	Great River Energy	12300 Elm Creek Blvd Maple Grove, MN 55369	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Tony	Hainault	anthony.hainault@co.hennepin.mn.us	Hennepin County DES	701 4th Ave S Ste 700 Minneapolis, MN 55415-1842	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Tyler	Hamman	tylerh@bepec.com	Basin Electric Power Cooperative	1717 E Interstate Ave Bismarck, ND 58501	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Patty	Hanson	phanson@rpu.org	Rochester Public Utilities	4000 E River Rd NE Rochester, MN 55906	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Norm	Harold	N/A	NKS Consulting	5591 E 180th St Prior Lake, MN 55372	Paper Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Scott	Hautala	scotth@hpuc.com	Hibbing Public Utilities	1902 E 6th Ave Hibbing, MN 55746	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Kimberly	Hellwig	kimberly.hellwig@stoel.com	Stoel Rives LLP	33 South Sixth Street Suite 4200 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Jared	Hendricks	hendricksj@owatonnautilities.com	Owatonna Public Utilities	PO Box 800 208 S Walnut Ave Owatonna, MN 55060-2940	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST

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Karolanne	Hoffman	kmh@dairy.net.com	Dairyland Power Cooperative	PO Box 817 La Crosse, WI 54602-0817	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Dave	Johnson	dave.johnson@aeoa.org	Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency	702 3rd Ave S Virginia, MN 55792	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Deborah	Knoll	dknoll@mnpower.com	Minnesota Power	30 W Superior St Duluth, MN 55802	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Tina	Koecher	tkoecher@mnpower.com	Minnesota Power	30 W Superior St Duluth, MN 558022093	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Kelly	Lady	kellyl@austinutilities.com	Austin Utilities	400 4th St NE Austin, MN 55912	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Erica	Larson	erica.larson@centerpointenergy.com	CenterPoint Energy	505 Nicollet Avenue P.O. Box 59038 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55459-0038	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Martin	Lepak	Martin.Lepak@aeoa.org	Arrowhead Economic Opportunity	702 S 3rd Ave Virginia, MN 55792	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Nick	Mark	nick.mark@centerpointenergy.com	CenterPoint Energy	505 Nicollet Mall Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Pam	Marshall	pam@energycents.org	Energy CENTS Coalition	823 7th St E St. Paul, MN 55106	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Scot	McClure	scotmcclure@alliantenergy.com	Interstate Power And Light Company	4902 N Biltmore Ln PO Box 77007 Madison, WI 537071007	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST

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John	McWilliams	jmm@dairy.net.com	Dairyland Power Cooperative	3200 East Ave SPO Box 817  La Crosse, WI 54601-7227	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Brian	Meloy	brian.meloy@stinson.com	Stinson, Leonard, Street LLP	50 S 6th St Ste 2600  Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
David	Moeller	dmoeller@allete.com	Minnesota Power	30 W Superior St  Duluth, MN 558022093	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Andrew	Moratzka	andrew.moratzka@stoel.com	Stoel Rives LLP	33 South Sixth St Ste 4200  Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Carl	Nelson	cnelson@mncee.org	Center for Energy and Environment	212 3rd Ave N Ste 560  Minneapolis, MN 55401	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Samantha	Norris	samanthanorris@alliantenergy.com	Interstate Power and Light Company	200 1st Street SE PO Box 351  Cedar Rapids, IA 524060351	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Matt	Okeefe	Matt.okeefe@oracle.com	Oracle	760 Market St FL 4  San Francisco, CA 94102	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Audrey	Partridge	apartridge@mncee.org	Center for Energy and Environment	212 3rd Ave. N. Suite 560  Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Joyce	Peppin	joyce@mrea.org	Minnesota Rural Electric Association	11640 73rd Ave N  Maple Grove, MN 55369	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST

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Lisa	Pickard	lseverson@minnkota.com	Minnkota Power Cooperative	5301 32nd Ave S Grand Forks, ND 58201	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Bill	Poppert	info@technologycos.com	Technology North	2433 Highwood Ave St. Paul, MN 55119	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Kathleen A	Prestidge	Kathy.Prestidge@stoel.com	Stoel Rives LLP	33 S 6th St Ste 4200 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Dave	Reinke	dreinke@dakotaelectric.com	Dakota Electric Association	4300 220th St W Farmington, MN 55024-9583	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Chris	Rustad	crustad@mnchamber.com	Minnesota Chamber of Commerce	400 Robert St N Ste 1500 Saint Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Christopher	Schoenherr	cp.schoenherr@smmpa.org	SMMPA	500 First Ave SW Rochester, MN 55902-3303	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Lauryn	Schothorst	lschothorst@mnchamber.com		400 Robert St N Ste 1500 Saint Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Ken	Smith	ken.smith@districtenergy.com	District Energy St. Paul Inc.	76 W Kellogg Blvd St. Paul, MN 55102	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Anna	Sommer	anna@sommerenergy.com	Sommer Energy LLC	PO Box 766 Grand Canyon, AZ 86023	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Russ	Stark	Russ.Stark@ci.stpaul.mn.us	City of St. Paul	390 City Hall 15 West Kellogg Boulevard Saint Paul, MN 55102	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL_CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST



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Kodi	Verhalen	kverhalen@briggs.com	Briggs & Morgan	2200 IDS Center 80 South Eighth Street Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Michael	Volker	mvolker@eastriver.coop	East River Electric Power Coop	211 S. Harth Ave  Madison, SD 57042	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Sharon N.	Walsh	swalsh@shakopeeutilities.com	Shakopee Public Utilities	255 Sarazin St  Shakopee, MN 55379	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Ethan	Warner	ethan.warner@centerpoint energy.com	CenterPoint Energy	505 Nicollet Mall  Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Robyn	Woeste	robynwoeste@alliantenergy.com	Interstate Power and Light Company	200 First St SE  Cedar Rapids, IA 52401	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST
Daniel P	Wolf	dan.wolf@state.mn.us	Public Utilities Commission	121 7th Place East Suite 350 St. Paul, MN 551012147	Electronic Service	No	SPL_SL__CIP SPECIAL SERVICE LIST