

CUSTOMER UPDATE

EQUIPMENT SERIES



Going Underground

If you live north of Broadway Street and east of North Grove Avenue, you may have noticed some construction activity over the last few weeks. The digging taking place in east-central Owatonna is part of OPU's plan to underground its power lines, to reduce power outages and improve customer service.

OPU has about 5,600 wood utility poles, most of which began life as western red cedar trees in Wisconsin. We use poles made from those trees because those poles last a long time — 40 to 60 years, on average. For decades, OPU has replaced between 50 and 60 of those poles each year, at an all-in cost of about \$1,800 per pole. Those poles are sturdy, but weather extremes, accidents and animals take a toll on them.

Those 5,600 poles not only carry about 200 miles of electrical wire, they also carry telephone and

cable wires. That's why we call them, "utility poles," because they carry the lines for several utilities.

To reduce power outages and improve reliability, OPU has been placing its lines underground to keep them away from severe weather, accidents and squirrels. Windstorms blow tree branches onto our lines, but squirrels really are Public Enemy #1. Each year, squirrels cause the lights to go out when they come in contact with electrical equipment.

OPU will place about five miles of its overhead lines underground this year. Undergrounding power lines costs about three to four times what it costs to run them overhead. It costs OPU about \$11 for each foot of power line we put underground — about the cost of two McDonald's Happy Meal. Something to think about the next time you turn on a light — or buy your kids a Happy Meal.