



UTILITY ENERGY MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

CLIENT PROFILE: BRAINERD PUBLIC UTILITIES



The Brainerd Lakes Area of Central Minnesota is known for its wealth of natural resources, and people who live and work there tend to value the environment. Therefore, it is not surprising that Brainerd Public Utilities (BPU) is one of the state's most progressive municipal utilities in terms of advancing energy conservation. Energy Management Solutions (EMS) is a key partner in this effort.

"We wanted a nonbiased energy consulting firm that could perform commercial energy audits and help administer our conservation rebate program."

Scott Sjolund, BPU

BPU provides reliable, cost-effective electricity, water, and wastewater services to homes and businesses in Brainerd and its immediate vicinity. It serves about eight thousand residential and commercial customers across a 25-square-mile area.

In 2003, BPU launched a Conservation Incentive Program (CIP) and hired EMS to administer services related to commercial and industrial energy conservation.

"We wanted a nonbiased energy consulting firm that could perform commercial energy audits and help administer our conservation rebate program," said Scott Sjolund, technology supervisor, BPU. "It made sense to hire EMS for that expertise rather than have someone fulltime on our staff."

EMS personnel work one-on-one with BPU customers. They visit business sites, review project plans, assess technologies, calculate potential energy savings, and help participating businesses get maximum rebates to lower their upfront costs of energy-saving facility projects and improve payback.

"We put a face on the utility's conservation program and provide an added value to its customers," said Peter Liska, EMS project manager and primary contact for BPU's commercial conservation program. "Our goal is to build trust and establish relationships in which BPU customers call us before they even begin a project. It is



(Left) Peter Liska of EMS and Rachel Breun of Crow Wing County look at energy-efficient lighting installed at the Crow Wing County Judicial Center; (Right) exterior Crow Wing County Judicial Center

EMS provides the following energy management services for commercial and industrial customers of BPU:

Facility Assessments

Energy Efficiency Project Identification

Utility Cost Analysis

Heat Loss Analysis

Energy Conservation Education and Training

Technology Evaluation

Financial Incentives Procurement

important that we get involved early in the process to ensure the greatest energy efficiency, cost savings, and rebates.”

Success stories can be found across the Brainerd area. BPU commercial customers that recently have worked with EMS to improve energy efficiency include the local hospital, a major paper mill, a large retail warehouse chain, an auto parts manufacturer, and an outdoor nature conservatory. Projects have ranged from energy-efficient lighting and air handling to process improvements and onsite renewable energy.

“Once we present the financial benefits and returns on investments, energy conservation projects often sell themselves,” Liska said. “Improving energy efficiency can lead to significant drops in monthly electric bills. When a business sees that, they want to do more.”

In addition to working directly with BPU customers, EMS helps educate local electricians and building contractors about energy conservation incentives that are available through the municipal utility.

“EMS does a great job of representing us,” Sjolund said. “Its people are knowledgeable and have a great depth of experience from working with major utilities and huge industrial projects in other areas, yet they fit right into the casual business environment of a smaller town like Brainerd. Customers like working with them because they are willing to listen, they bring in new ideas, and they get the job done.”

Like other electric utilities in Minnesota, BPU is mandated to set and achieve annual goals for kWh and kW savings. It voluntarily reports results to the State and is proud to be meeting its targets.

“We want to lead by example,” Sjolund said, noting BPU has made numerous energy conservation improvements to its own facilities over the years. “If we show people that we are spending time and money to make changes, we hope it will encourage others to do the same.”

BPU buys wholesale electricity from Minnesota Power, and reducing demand through conservation helps prevent the need for expensive new generation facilities, which ultimately keeps energy prices lower for BPU and its local customers.

“Our main goal is to provide reliable service at the lowest possible cost, and energy conservation is a big part of that,” Sjolund said. “Reducing load through conservation lessens the need to build more power plants, which helps keep energy costs low and provides environmental benefits. Our customers appreciate that, and we value the role EMS plays in making it happen.”



(Above) BPU Technology Supervisor Scott Sjolund depends upon EMS to advance the utility’s commercial energy conservation programs; (Below) EMS works with the City of Brainerd to ensure facilities, such as the historic Brainerd City Hall, operate energy efficiently.

