

SNOW, WIND, WATER AND FIRE

UTILITY FACED CHALLENGES UNLIKE ANY OTHERS



The winter of 1996-97 is unforgettable to many utility employees in the Upper Midwest. Beginning in early November, blizzard after blizzard pummeled the Red River Valley, blanketing the area in nearly 100 inches of snow.

On April 5, 1997, snow and winds gusting up to 70 mph battered the region. Some areas reported 17 inches of snow and more than 2 inches of rain by the time the storm ended. Thick ice on power lines combined with the strong winds knocked out power to more than 96,000 homes in the Red River Valley, including 26,000 customers of Xcel Energy, then Northern States Power Co. (NSP). The storm

caused extensive damage to NSP's distribution and transmission systems, leaving about 160 distribution and transmission structures in need of repair or replacement. Line workers braved the brutal blizzard conditions to repair power poles that had snapped like toothpicks.

Then, April 18, the utility was dealt a second brutal blow. Floodwaters began to break through the dikes protecting the cities of Grand Forks and East Grand Forks. Water poured into the cities, flooding electric and natural gas equipment. And in the midst of the water, a massive fire raged in downtown Grand Forks. Since NSP bucket trucks could maneuver in deep water better than fire trucks, utility linemen helped firemen rescue people from burning buildings.

Utility employees, many of whom had flooded homes of their own, began the daunting task of disconnecting 12,000 electric meters and 12,500 natural gas services to ensure safety when residents would begin to reenter the mandatory evacuation areas of the cities. More than 100 NSP employees from other regions came to assist in the effort.



In addition, the company supported the community with resources.

NSP provided office space, computers, telephones and administrative assistance to the Grand Forks City Electrical Inspector's office for approximately five weeks. NSP's Call Center answered more than 10,000 calls for the electrical inspector.

As community residents launched into a massive clean-up effort, NSP employees and retiree volunteers came from several states to help. The company's employees and retired employees contributed more than \$58,000 to the Red Cross Minnesota/North Dakota flood relief fund and the company added a \$50,000 corporate donation to the cause.

Meanwhile, work continued to restore electricity and natural gas service throughout the community. By the time restoration work was complete, NSP had replaced 35 underground electric transformers and six major electric switch centers. Workers had reconstructed 23 miles of gas piping and 1,560 services.

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