What is MEA doing for us? Are we in fact getting a return on our investment (ROI) in the association from our membership dues? This question is getting easier and easier for me to answer with the help of a few new tools on the MEA website. An ROI worksheet has been developed to show us exactly how much we are saving when it comes to Education, Compliance and Legislative Issues. And to kick off the New Year, Federated Insurance and MEA are celebrating 60 years of promoting safety by offering us even more benefits.

MEA members can start receiving the following as of January 1:

• FREE 8-hr NEC class taught by MEA ($155 value)
• FREE AWAIR Safety Program ($499 value) — MEA members also have access to purchase a webinar that was conducted by Andy Smoka that walks you through your AWAIR manual and how to set your program up
• FREE 45 Electrical Safety Meeting Talks ($40 Value)

For more details on each of these 2017 promotional benefits, read Alex Hyatt’s article on page 14. If you are a current member of MEA and you are not utilizing the benefits that are referenced above or in the calculator, contact MEA to find out how. If you would like to become a member of MEA to start taking advantage of these savings opportunities today, contact MEA. Call (612) 827-6117 or email mea@electricalassociation.com.

As the master electricians in your shop need to renew their licenses by February 28, make sure you take a look at the training schedule that MEA has for the new year and get your employees registered. MEA will be holding numerous classroom classes throughout the state as well as 2-hour and 4-hour online classes to meet our needs. Take the middle section of this newsletter out and post it in your breakroom for everyone to see the upcoming course schedule (online and classroom), quiz on the code and toolbox talks. Sign up early to guarantee a seat in these classes.

2017 is going to be another busy year filled with some recurring challenges and some new challenges. I know that the value that I get from having MEA on my side is priceless but being able to quantify it with online tools makes it that much better. The new promotional items that Federated and MEA are offering for 2017 will make our jobs that much easier as we head into a New Year.
Hello from Your New Executive Director!

I am thrilled to have been selected to work for you all in continuing to build a strong and safe Electrical Industry. This past winter conference was exceptionally amazing. Past MEA presidents, friends from regulatory agencies, long-time MEA sponsors and supporters along with many who have had the pleasure of working with Judi professionally and getting to know her personally showed up at the celebratory dinner to say “Thank You” and “Farewell” to their fearless leader from the past 23 years.

The heartfelt night was surrounded by some good old-fashioned business as well! The MEA committees that met had robust conversations that led to great action items and takeaways that we at the MEA office are excited to implement. Federated Insurance gave a very informative afternoon presentation about succession planning for business, and a special thank you to our continued conference sponsor – Federated Insurance – who has now been partnering with MEA for 60 years with a total support of over 2 million dollars.

Please mark your calendars and save the date for the Annual Spring Business meeting (April 27–29) at the Hilton in Bloomington. We will be sending out agendas and registration forms shortly. It is my pleasure, along with the entire MEA staff, to continue to work for you.

Federated Insurance—

Employee Suspensions: When and How?

There is no federal or state law in the state where the company operates that prohibits employers from suspending employees as a disciplinary action or while an investigation takes place, as may occur if the employer reasonably determines that it can more fully and fairly investigate a situation in the employee’s absence or where the alleged misconduct is so severe that it would warrant immediate suspension or discharge if the allegations are substantiated. That said and as discussed below, in some cases an UNPAID suspension as to an exempt employee can jeopardize the salary basis that is otherwise required to maintain the exemption status, but even in this scenario an unpaid suspension does not expressly violate the law. Non-exempt employees, including any as may be subject to a tip credit, can be subject to unpaid suspensions absent a contract that precludes them.

As a general rule relative to disciplinary policies, employers have discretion to establish such policies as they see fit if no employment contract otherwise governs the issue. Disciplinary suspensions, and suspensions pending investigation, are within an employer’s right to issue if no employment contract otherwise supports these courses of action based on the facts and where the approach is consistent with how the employer has responded to prior similar scenarios. If an employee is non-exempt, he or she need not be paid for a disciplinary suspension unless company policy, practice or a contract entitle the employee otherwise. As to suspensions pending investigation, employer policies should support issuance of back pay if the employer’s investigation reveals no wrongdoing (or perhaps did not reveal any action on the part of the suspected employee that warranted discharge or an unpaid disciplinary suspension). In this way a suspended employee is made whole for the time lost, and does not suffer what effectively is an unpaid disciplinary suspension. If one is determined not to have been warranted in the first place.

If an employee is exempt, however, then note that an employer generally cannot withhold wag-
Wow! What an election. The pundits got it wrong and things are going to change. Should be interesting.

The Republicans in Minnesota House expanded their majority to 76 members and the State Senate flipped from DFL control to Republican control for the first time in 6 years and only the second time in 45 years. Republicans now have a one vote Senate majority of 34 to 33. There are 44 new members of the legislature who must now make the transition from campaigning to governing.

This is a business-friendly legislature and we have an opportunity to address some of our long-term business concerns.

2017 session of the legislature convened on January 3 and will end in May. Legislators will be concentrating on passing bills that will fund state government for the next two years and how best to apply the projected $1.4 billion surplus. The frequently discussed special session did not happen and the projected surplus was left unapplied.

January 2017 session of the legislature convened on January 3 and will end in May. Legislators will be concentrating on passing bills that will fund state government for the next two years and how best to apply the projected $1.4 billion surplus. The frequently discussed special session did not happen and the projected surplus was left unapplied.

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Winter is Made for Compliance

The ground is frozen, it’s cold and windy outside, and we’re stuck this way for the next few months. So, what better time to focus on the boring– getting compliant. Seriously, winter is made for compliance, so it’s a good time to focus on some policies and paperwork that probably weren’t high on the priority list when the temperature was allowed for short sleeves. Here are some good places to start:

1. Paid Sick Leave
If you have any employees working in Minneapolis or St. Paul, this one applies to you. Minneapolis and St. Paul both enacted paid sick leave ordinances that will go into effect soon. Depending on the size of your workforce, these could be in effect for you as early as July. The ordinances require any employer doing business in these cities – even if you’re not headquartered in the cities – to provide one hour of sick time for every 30 hours the employee works, so approximately 68 hours per year for full-time employees who do not regularly work overtime. Employers must also have policies that explain how sick leave works, including how to call in when sick and how the time is tracked. If you don’t have a policy and you do business in the Twin Cities, it’s best to get prepared now.

2. Handbooks
Minnesota law requires that if you have a handbook (and most employers do), you need to include certain policies, including wage disclosure, personnel file access, and more. Additionally, the laws have changed, requiring updates to other policies, including harassment, and parental leave. If you haven’t reviewed your handbook in the past three years, it’s time for an update.

3. 1-9s
When you hire, new employees are required to show proof that they are legally authorized to work in the United States and complete an I-9 form. The I-9 is changing effective January 22, 2017. While you should not update all I-9s you have on file, anyone you hire after January 22, will need to complete the new form. The form is available at www.uscis.gov/ I-9. It also doesn’t hurt to review your I-9 files to make sure all the forms are complete and kept securely and separately from personnel files.

4. Performance Management
When was the last time you talked with employees about how they’re doing? The winter is a great time to talk about their performance, what they did great and not-so-great. Countless employee surveys show that employees want their managers to talk to them about their performance, and when they do, employees are happier and more productive. So, go over job descriptions to make sure they accurately reflect what the employee actually does and sit each employee down to talk. For your employment attorney’s sake, please document the discussion.

Yes, winter is slow, but it offers a great opportunity to get up-to-date on the important. Going over these four areas will go a long way to make you compliant and in a better position to get work as more and more generals are asking for labor compliance certificates. If you aren’t sure what you need to cover or want help, please contact me, at kbischoff@thrivelawconsulting.com.

You Need to Know

COMPLIANCE

NATIONAL

IRS Releases Final 2016 Forms 1094 and 1095... The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has released the final forms and instructions for Forms 1094 and 1095 for calendar year 2016 reporting. Employers are required to report in early 2017 for calendar year 2016.

MINNESOTA

Jobsite daily attendance form will track licensed electrical workers... A new Jobsite Daily Attendance Record form will be distributed to large electrical projects by CCLD’s electrical representatives and electrical inspectors to assist with enforcement of Minnesota’s electrical licensing laws and rules. Because the Minnesota Electrical Act requires specific information to ensure compliance, this new roster form will replace any existing rosters in use. Electrical inspectors have the option of conducting random license checks to verify compliance and maintain the authority to conduct license checks across the entire work site if necessary. (www.dli.mn.gov/ CCLD. Dec 2016)

CONSTRUCTION TRENDS

US Residential Construction... Privately-owned housing starts in November were at a seasonally adjusted annual rate 18.7% below the revised October estimate of 1,340,000 and is 6.9% below the November 2015 rate of 1,171,000. Single-family housing starts in November were at a rate 4.1% below the revised October figure of 863,000. (www.census.gov/. Dec 2016)

US Residential Sales... Sales of new single-family houses in November 2016 were at a seasonally adjusted annual rate 5.2% above the revised October rate and is 16.5% above the November 2015 estimate (www.census.gov/ economic-indicators. Dec 2016)

ECONOMY

NATIONAL

US Stock Indicators... Leading stock indicators (LEI) for the U.S. were unchanged in November, remaining at 124, following a 0.1% increase in October, and a 0.3% increase in September. (www.conference-board.org/. Dec 2016)

Consumer Price Index... The Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers increased 0.2% in November on a seasonally adjusted basis. Over the last 12 months, the all items index rose 1.7% before seasonal adjustment. (www.bls.gov. Dec 2016)

MINNESOTA

Interest Rates... Mortgage rates in MN for November are up to 4.38% for 30-yr fixed from 3.48% in September. (www.bankrate.com.)

ENERGY

Commerce Announces 2017 Made in Minnesota solar incentive amounts... On November 14, 2016, the Minnesota Department of Commerce announced incentive amounts for solar projects implemented under the Made in
CESCO.com is your 24/7 tool to research and purchase electrical products from Crescent Electric Supply Company.

Shop local inventory on 200,000 products and place your order for will call, Crescent truck or FedEx delivery. Log on today to see the most advanced e-commerce platform in the industry.

- View - extensive product content
- Compare - products side by side
- Check - local inventory
- Shop - using account pricing
- Upload - an Excel parts list via the quick order pad
- Shop - pre-built lists using your own part numbers
- Order - on account or with a credit card
- Check - open orders
- Get - tracking info
- Print - invoices
- Review - billing summary
- Pay - statements via secure bill pay

Need help getting online? Questions? Email us at: onlinesupport@cesco.com
How a Bill Becomes a Law in Minnesota

1. Idea
A bill is an idea for a new law or an idea to change an old law. Anyone can suggest an idea for a bill — an individual, consumer group, professional association, government agency or the governor. Most often, however, ideas come from legislators, the only ones who can begin to move an idea through the process. There are 134 House members and 67 senators.

2. Legal Form
The Office of the Revisor of Statutes and staff from other legislative offices work with legislators in putting the idea for a new law into proper legal form. The revisor’s office is responsible for assuring that the proposal’s form complies with the rules of both bodies before the bill is introduced into the Minnesota House of Representatives and the Minnesota Senate.

3. Sponsors
Each bill must have a legislator to sponsor and introduce it in the Legislature. That legislator’s name appears on the bill along with the bill’s file number to identify it as it moves through the legislative process. There may be up to 34 co-sponsors from the House and four from the Senate. Their names also appear on the bill.

4. Introduction
The chief House sponsor of the bill introduces it in the House; the chief Senate sponsor introduces it in the Senate. Identical bills introduced in both bodies are called companion bills. The bill introduction is called the first reading. The presiding officer of the House then refers it to an appropriate House committee for discussion; the same thing happens in the Senate.

5. Committee
The bill is discussed in one or more committees depending upon the subject matter. After discussion, committee members recommend action — approval or disapproval — to the full House and full Senate. The House committee then sends a report to the House about its action on the bill; the Senate committee does likewise in the Senate.

6. Floor
After the full House or Senate accepts the committee report, the bill has its second reading and is placed on the House agenda called the General Register or the Senate agenda called General Orders. After this point, House and Senate procedures differ slightly.

7. General Registry
In the House, the General Register serves as a parking lot where bills await action by the full body. Bills chosen to appear on the Calendar for the Day or the Fiscal Calendar are drawn from the General Register.

In the Senate, a different procedure is used. Bills are listed on the General Orders agenda. Senate members, acting as the “committee of the whole,” have a chance to debate the issue and offer amendments on the bill. Afterwards, they vote to recommend: passage of the bill, progress (delay action) or further committee action. And sometimes they recommend that a bill not pass. From here, the bill is placed on the Calendar.

8. Calendar for the Day
In the House, the Calendar for the Day is a list of bills the House Rules and Legislative Administration Committee has designated for the full House to vote on. Members can vote to amend the bill, and after amendments are dispensed with, the bill is given its third reading before the vote of the full body is taken. The House also has a Fiscal Calendar, on which the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee or House Taxes Committee can call up for consideration any tax or finance bill that has had a second reading. The bills are debated, amended and passed in one day. In the Senate, bills approved by the “committee of the whole” are placed on the Calendar. At this point, the bill has its third reading, after which time the bill cannot be amended unless the entire body agrees to it. Toward the end of the session, the Senate Rules and Administration Committee designates bills from the General Orders calendar to receive priority consideration. These Special Orders bills are debated, amended and passed in one day. A bill needs 60 votes to pass the House and 34 votes to pass the Senate. If the House and Senate each pass the same version of the bill, it goes to the governor for a signature.

9. Conference
If the House and Senate versions of the bill are different, they go to a conference committee. In the House, the speaker appoints three or five representatives, and in the Senate, the Subcommittee on Committees of the Rules and Administration Committee selects the same number of senators to form the committee. The committee meets to work out differences in the two bills and to reach a compromise.

10. Floor
The conference committee’s compromise bill then goes back to the House and the Senate for another vote. If both bodies pass the bill in this form, it is sent to the governor for approval or disapproval. (If one or both bodies reject the report, it goes back to the conference committee for further consideration.) A conference committee report cannot be amended on the House or Senate floor.

11. Governor
Once the governor has the bill, he or she may: sign it, and the bill becomes law; veto it within three days; or allow it to become law by not signing it. During session, the House and Senate can override a governor’s veto. This requires a two-thirds vote in the House (90 votes) and Senate (43 votes). The governor also may “line-item veto” parts of a money bill, or “pocket veto” a bill passed during the last three days of the session by not signing it within 14 days after final adjournment.

Search, browse and order products, anywhere your job takes you!
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✓ Get pricing & availability
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✓ View your saved lists
✓ Track status of orders
✓ Access branch information

Ask your Viking Electric sales professional for more information!
Hello everybody! I’m excited to join MEA as your new Executive Manager. Previously, I was the Program Administrator for the Prevailing Wage unit at Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry.

Every year you are asked to participate in the Prevailing Wage Survey. The survey is voluntary and is used to set new prevailing wage rates annually. Every year is a new opportunity to change the wage rates that prevail in your area.

While the typical survey period starts in April and ends the first week in June, participants can submit surveys at any time of the year. This means you can use your slow periods to your advantage. Why not start now? The survey will ask for the past 12 months of projects. Focus on work performed in April 2015 forward. For those early projects use the project end date as the project date listed in the survey. Anything older than 12 months from the official survey start date will not be considered by DLi.

Residential vs Commercial Projects

For commercial and residential projects, total project cost must exceed $2,500 to be considered. This is not subcontract cost, but total cost. Estimating total project cost is fine. Also keep in mind the State’s definition of residential is quite narrow and differs from the Federal DOL’s definition of residential. State residential projects are single- and two-family homes. Any rowhomes, condominiums or apartment complexes are considered commercial construction for purposes of the survey.

Highway/Heavy Projects

Highway/Heavy projects need to have a total project cost exceeding $25,000 in order to be considered. Again, this is total project cost, not the cost of your subcontract. Estimating total cost is fine.

For Prevailing Wage assistance, call MEA 612-827-6117

For Prevailing Wage assistance, call MEA 612-827-6117

Best Jobs in 2017—College Degree Not Required!

The professions expected to show one of the biggest job growth rates in 2017 and the largest growth in sheer number of jobs will be trade skills, according to a year-end report from CareerBuilder and labor market data provider Emsi. The U.S. economy is expected to add just over 1 million new jobs in fields such as electrician, plumber and HVAC technician in 2017. That’s a job growth rate of 8%.

Skills trades (electrician, plumber, HVAC) increased postings to come up with their list of 2017’s best jobs. Skills trades (electrician, plumber, HVAC) increased 8% from 2012 to 2016 (an increase of over one million new workers!)

Do not include social security, worker’s compensation premiums, unemployment, or taxes. This is considered payroll burden, not benefits, and is required of an employer by law.

This project can seem daunting, but MEA is available for private consultation to train an individual on your staff regarding the reporting and submitting of wage data.
2017 NEC Changes

1. For electrical equipment to be "readily accessible" in 2017, the use of _____ is permitted.
   a. keys
   b. ladders
   c. special tools
   d. None of the above.

2. A receptacle includes _____.
   a. duplex 15A, 125 V devices
   b. 50A range devices
   c. a device used for connection of utilization equipment
   d. All of the above.

3. If torque requirements are listed with equipment instructions then _____.
   a. apply the hand tighten rule
   b. increase the initial torque to 110% of requirement
   c. only used certified tools when the AHJ is present
   d. record torque of connections using torque rated tools

4. If equipment is reconditioned and resold, the marking must indicate _____.
   a. the date of resale
   b. the name or mark of the reconditioning agent
   c. the original equipment design specs
   d. All of the above.

5. If equipment is installed in space with limited access (above a lay-in ceiling) then _____.
   a. a ceiling T bar is permitted in the access space
   b. a ceiling T bar is NOT permitted in the access space
   c. the ceiling must be at least 6" below the equipment for access
   d. the doors of the equipment must be able to be removed

6. When measuring for receptacles installed near sinks, the measurement is _____.
   a. the top of the inside edge of the bowl
   b. the bottom of the inside edge of the bowl
   c. the center of the spigot
   d. None of the above.

2017 NEC Update

The 2017 National Electrical Code® has arrived! It has some interesting developments in sync with the progress in the production and storage of electrical power. Four of the five new articles and some new sections of existing articles are used to bring the code up to date with the needs of the electrical industry where private power production and distribution are involved. Where large-scale power production and distribution were typically reserved for utilities, which are not included in the NEC—they use the National Electrical Safety Code—they these new endeavors are for private producers, who are in the purview of the NEC.

Article 691 is new to the 2017 and is titled "Large scale photovoltaic (PV) Electric Power Production Facility". It is only a one page article but starts with the scope of installation of PV systems of at least 5000 kW. These large scale systems are only accessible by qualified persons. These power production facilities are not owned by the utilities but have connections through medium or high voltage switchgear or substations, to sell power to the utilities for transmission. Because much of the large PV station equipment is unique to that large scale PV system, much of the installation may be reviewed by the AHJ as documented by engineering reports or accepted engineering design as noted on Art 691.6.

Article 690 covers the existing smaller scale PV systems that are used more for residential and commercial use under the 5000 kW limits. This article has undergone many revisions and updates as industry changes and adapts technology to needs in the industry. See page 11 for statistics regarding PV systems in Minnesota.

Article 705 "Interconnected Electric Power Production Sources" contains a part IV, which deals with Microgrid Systems. These systems are meant to be connected to the utility grid but have their own power production. They can disconnect from the utility and operate as their own separate micro grid for a campus of business or a campus of buildings by the same owner. As you will note in part IV, disconnection from, and reconnection to, the utility grid must all be accomplished with the proper equipment.

Article 706 "Energy Storage Systems" deals with all the methods used to store electric energy. Defined energy storage systems including batteries, capacitors, flywheel storage, compressed air storage, and flow batteries are covered. As you will note, the article is relatively large and will no doubt grow as we develop new and different ways to store the energy produced.

In the next issue of the MEA News, this intrepid reporter will report on Stand-Alone Systems and DC Microgrids.
Toolbox Talks

Winter Driving

Winter creates the most difficult driving season for us in the Midwest. Snow and ice can create dangerous situations during even your most routine drives. Prepare yourself and your vehicle for the winter. Conditions can change rapidly from clear-and-sunny to treacherous-with-zero-visibility. The key to survival is to be prepared!

Vehicle Checks

- Check coolant level
- Check condition and power of batteries
- Test heater, defroster and fans
- Inspect windshield for cracks; they will expand when glass is heated from inside
- Replace worn windshield wiper blades
- Have a full tank of gas
- Tires—Inspect tires for wear and proper inflation. The rubber used to make snow tires is specially designed for cold conditions. It’s softer, which allows the tires to maintain better contact with the road. And the treads are designed to grip the road better. All-season tires are not the same as winter or snow tires.

On the Road

- Know condition of road surface, touch brakes to measure effectiveness
- Clear your windows, lights, mirrors completely of snow and ice before you set off
- Slow down—drive the conditions, not the speed limit
- Do not use cruise control
- Reduce speed over bridges—they often freeze before the roads do
- Increase following distance
- If your vehicle is not equipped with ABS, pump your breaks when stopping

Emergency Preparedness

- Warm clothing hat, gloves, coat and boots should be worn or kept in car
- Cell phone
- Flashlight with new batteries
- First-aid kit
- Small shovel and sand/kitty litter
- Emergency food and bottled water
- Candles & blanket
- Jumper cables & tow ropes
- Stock up on extra fluids—windshield fluid, oil, de-icer, etc.

Accidents

- If you are stranded during a winter storm—Number 1 Rule: Stay with your vehicle!
- Call emergency services and let help come to you.
- Run the engine intermittently to keep warm, but make sure the exhaust pipe is free from snow!

Note on Black Ice

Perhaps the deadliest danger of all is “black ice,” which forms on a roadway, usually due to snow melting and re-freezing. It is almost invisible, so drivers fail to recognize it, resulting in very serious accidents. Always be alert to the possibility of black ice when temperatures are near or below freezing. Pavement that looks dry but appears darker in color and dull-looking should alert you to the presence of black ice. You can very easily lose control of your vehicle.
Celebrating 60+ Years of "Pride in the Electrical Trade"

Presented with the help & support of these fine sponsors!

The WETC in cooperation with
JOE HERTEL & MONTE EWING
will be offering three opportunities for
WISCONSIN ELECTRICAL EXAM PREP TRAINING,
ELECTRICAL CODE REVIEW, OR CEU’S FOR CREDENTIAL MAINTENANCE

February 24-25
The Plaza Hotel & Suites • 201 N. 17th Ave, Wausau WI

March 17-18
Holiday Inn Eau Claire South • 4751 Owen Ayers Ct, Eau Claire WI

March 31-April 1
Holiday Inn Express, Janesville Conference Center • 3100 Wellington Place, Janesville, WI

Note: This is the same class presented in three locations on different dates for your convenience.
Find a registration form at wiellectrictrades.com

Are you planning to take the WISCONSIN MASTER or JOURNEYMAN ELECTRICIAN’S EXAM?
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If you answered YES to any of these questions, this is the class that will help you!

Wisconsin Electrical License Exams are conducted twice each month in various locations!
Plan now to prepare for exams on:
• March 8 or April 5 - Pewaukee
• March 21 or May 3 - Appleton
• April 18 - Eau Claire

INCREASE YOUR VALUE TO YOUR EMPLOYER—
add to your knowledge of National and State Electrical Codes!

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New Products

RAB – KNOCK
LED Soft glow, even light. KNOCK™ - under cabinet LED that enhances beauty and function. KNOCK provides clean, uniform illumination across the length of the fixture, on walls and over countertops. Up to 440 lumens/foot, this fixture leads in energy efficiency, beating out the competition. Lengths: 8”, 16”, 24”, & 32”. Colors: brown & white.

RAB – SWISH
Top-tier performance. Outstanding payback. Frosted polycarbonate lens with proprietary diffusion design provides a uniform distribution and reduces glare. Easy tool-less removal and installation for cleaning provides a uniform distribution and reduces glare.

POWER-STRUT - Mustang Universal One-Piece Pipe, Conduit (GRC, EMT & IMC) and Tubing Clamps
Power-Strut pipe, conduit and O.D. tubing clamps are made on punch press dies from hot rolled, pickled and oiled steel which conforms to the ASTM A-1008, A-1011 SS, A-575 and A-576 standards. Select sizes of O.D. tubing clamps are available in stainless steel or aluminum.

3M – Terminal Kits
3M™ Terminal Kits are a great way to experience firsthand what has kept 3M a leading supplier of terminals for more than 30 years. It’s not just performance that has electricians and contractors coming back, it’s also the speed of installation.

Greenlee Textron’s Micro Cable Cutter
Greenlee Textron’s ES32FML micro cable cutter uses a 10.8V battery platform and has the capacity to cut 1/4-in. fine-stranded copper cable. It has a 350-degree rotating blade head, an autoretract blade feature, a battery level indicator and a built-in LED for illumination while working. (www.ecmag.com)

RAB – EZPAN
Cut energy costs in half. An affordable ultra-low-profile LED panel. At just under 2” high, EZPAN is an ideal solution for shallow plenums. It’s sleek and minimal design will look great no matter where it’s installed. Diffused, white opalescent lens delivers even, glare-free light that’s ideal for healthcare facilities, educational facilities and computer workspaces.

January 2017
Not many of us have the time in our day to monitor what is happening in the halls of the Capitol, and that can be a problem for our businesses if we don’t have a voice in the process. Luckily for MEA members our voices are heard. For over a decade and a half we have been represented by a professional lobbyist at the State Capitol with an ear to the ground and a voice that is heard.

Legislative decisions can happen all too quickly and rest assured MEA representation will be keeping a close eye on bill introductions and hearings and will be there defending your business interests. A small list of recent issues enacted or following include:

- Stopped sales tax on labor
- Restrictions on the use of temp employees did not pass
- Unemployment comp tax reduction. Every employer should get some reduction
- Successfully worked to repeal the business to business sales taxes
- Reduced license fees
- Support DOL’s efforts to contain costs in ways that promote growth
- Tax relief
- Economic development
- And many, many more

The MEA staff and lobbyists work hard to represent the majority viewpoint of our members. That majority viewpoint comes from our members. MEA will be sending your annual legislative survey soon. Please let them know which issues are most important to you. Contact Clara DeRosier, Executive Director, to learn how to be more involved in grassroots efforts.

Facts on the Minnesota Solar Industry

There are currently more than 138 solar companies at work throughout the value chain in Minnesota, employing 1,995 people.

- In 2015, Minnesota installed 13 MW of solar electric capacity, ranking 4th 25th nationally. Installed solar capacity in Minnesota has grown by 116% over the last year.
- In 2015, $31 million was invested on solar installations in Minnesota. This represents a 106% increase over the previous year, and is expected to grow again this year.
- The 37 MW of solar energy currently installed in Minnesota ranks the state 30th in the country in installed solar capacity. There is enough solar energy installed in the state to power 4,700 homes.
- Over the next five years, Minnesota is expected to install 1,073 MW of solar electric capacity, ranking the state 17th over that time span. This amount is more than 36 times the amount of solar installed over the last five years.
- Installed solar PV system prices in the U.S. have dropped steadily by 12% from last year and 66% from 2010. Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA)

Aurora Solar Project

The $250 million solar project by Edina-based Geronimo Energy calls for the installation of ground-mounted solar panels at 21 mostly rural sites from Chisago County to Waseca. Geronimo planned to finish the project in 2016 and sell the power to Xcel Energy. The other local sites are midway between Mankato and Eagle Lake and just east of St. Peter.

It is by far the largest solar project approved in MN, and in one sweep increases the state’s solar output sevenfold. The combined 100 million watts is the equivalent of a small traditional power plant.

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Minnesota Solar Incentive Program. The incentive amounts are for the fourth year (2017) of the 10-year, $15-million-a-year Made in Minnesota Solar Incentive Program. The program is available to customers of Xcel Energy, Minnesota Power, and Otter Tail Power who install solar electric systems (solar photovoltaic) using solar modules certified by Xcel Energy Utilities offer rebates for upgrades in energy efficiency (MN Chamber of Commerce. Jan 2017). Some energy utilities throughout the state are introducing new rebates for energy upgrades in 2017. In some cases, the rebates are going up by more than 20%. Contact Jill Curan to find out what your options may be for increased funding for energy efficiency projects at jcuran@mnchamber.com. (MN Chamber of Commerce. Dec 2016)
Community News

Welcome New Members
SignArt Co Inc, Gerald Newhouse.... St Paul

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

MEA Winter Conference Sponsors
Platinum Sponsor:

Gold Sponsor:

Silver Sponsors:

Congratulations
Luma Sales... has added Kari Prantner to their lighting quotations group and Jennifer Walter to their customer service group.

Sam Sampson, DL1... Sam Sampson, senior electrical representative at DL1, received an award from the members of MEA in recognition and appreciation for his 20+ years of service to the electrical industry.

Education & Meetings
MEA Spring Business Meeting... Save the Date: April 27–29. Bloomington Hilton

Moves & New Locations
CEE, Neighborhood Energy Connection plan to merge... The boards of the Neighborhood Energy Connection (NEC) and Center for Energy and Environment (CEE), two Minnesota nonprofits known for their community-focused energy efficiency efforts, plan to merge their organizations for greater reach and mission impact. Board and staff leaders of the two organizations have been actively considering options for a merger since earlier this year and have now arrived at a tentative plan for process and timing. (MN Dept of Commerce, Nov 2016)

Smith Schafer & Associates... Blanski Peter Kronlage & Zoch, P.A. and MEA member, Smith Schafer & Associates, are proud to announce the merger of their accounting firms, effective January 1, 2017. The combined firms will operate under Smith Schafer’s name and will continue to operate out of the firm’s Twin Cities office in the Valley Square Corporate Center, located next to Golden Valley Commons off Highway 55.

Werner Electric’s Construction Team delivers solutions with the right supplies and unmatched support for your business needs. Our experienced team provides complete electrical solutions for commercial, industrial, and residential contractors. With same day/next day delivery, over 20 product specialists, and seven locations, we can manage your project from our receiving dock to your doorstep.

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es or salary for any exempt employee if he or she performs any work in a workweek.

That said, there are some exceptions. The federal Fair Labor Standards Act does permit suspension-related deductions from the salary of such employees when such a penalty is imposed in good faith for infractions of safety rules of major significance, OR for unpaid disciplinary suspensions of one or more FULL days, which also must be imposed in good faith for workplace conduct rule infractions (www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/overtime/modelPolicy_PF.htm). This provision refers to SERIOUS misconduct, though, not basic performance or attendance issues, and arguably not to partial-week suspensions where the employer is merely investigating (i.e., before an unpaid suspension issues as a form of disciplinary action in and of itself). An employer may thus impose in good faith an unpaid suspension upon an exempt employee for infractions of workplace conduct rules, such as rules prohibiting sexual harassment, workplace violence, drug or alcohol use, or for violations of state or federal laws, but not for anything that would meet not this criteria.

No suspension can be imposed if there is not a written policy in place that is applicable to all employees and that provides for it.


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**Member Benefits**

**Three New Reasons to Join or Renew in 2017**

It’s that time of the year again. The holidays are over and the New Year is here. With business starting to slow down, at least a little bit, this is the ideal time for contractors and their electrical workers to receive their training and safety is a top priority.

In 2017, Federated Insurance and MEA are celebrating 80 years of promoting safety in the industry. Upon membership renewal, every contractor will receive the following benefits.

**Free Continuing Education**

It’s a code update year. What better way to promote safety than by offering free training on the new 2017 National Electrical Code? Every member contractor receives 8 hours of continuing education credit for free at any one of our classroom code classes ($155 value). Please contact our office to get registered today.

**Free AWAIR Safety Program**

Having an AWAIR Safety Program in place is critical to avoiding workplace accidents and hefty fines for violations. But constructing an AWAIR Safety Program from scratch is no easy task. It is challenging to satisfy all of the requirements of MN OSHA, which is why MEA (in cooperation with MN OSHA) produced an AWAIR safety manual customized specifically for electrical contractors. In 2017, we will be offering the AWAIR in a downloadable format free to all member contractors on our website. Stay tuned for more details.

**Free Electrical Safety Talks**

MEA takes the guesswork out of what to incorporate into your safety meetings. Electrical Safety Talks are a series of short, concise, industry-specific topics. A sign-in list is included for OSHA documentation. Electrical Safety Talks are a great refresher, and keep your employees abreast of changes in regulations, safety procedures, equipment, personal protective equipment (PPE), and job assignments and responsibilities. Join or renew your dues in 2017 and MEA will provide you with a free Electrical Safety Talks, courtesy of Federated Insurance.

So don’t wait any longer. Join or renew now to start receiving your free member benefits.

**Find theses webinars from MEA’s home page at www.electricalassociation.com**

**Electrical Personnel**

**Branches of the Electrical Circuit for Electricians**

Although not specifically licensed as specialty electricians in Minnesota, many electricians tend to specialize in different parts of the industry.

Some people prefer the residential market where they become very proficient at wiring in dwellings. They study the requirements in the electrical code for dwelling units and gain experience in installing and troubleshooting circuits found in residential applications. These electricians may install all the circuitry in the dwellings – from the line voltage services to the internet connection and home theater. Dwellings include single-family homes, apartment buildings, and condominiums. The Minnesota Electrical Association helps keep these electricians up to date and informed as to the code requirements.

Other electricians prefer to work with commercial wiring. Commercial construction is often thought of as stores, offices, schools, etc., and these electricians are adept at using the NEC to determine loads and installing adequate wiring to keep the businesses up and running smoothly. These electricians understand the lighting requirement and may recommend different types of lighting for different applications. They understand loading of circuits for best performance. They may be involved in security and fire system installation and, of course, the maintenance of all these different systems. MEA also helps with needs of data centers and hospitals to educate and train electricians for all these commercial applications.

Industrial electricians are thought of as a branch of licensed electricians in Minnesota and surrounding states. Industrial electricians tend to be in manufacturing facilities. Industrial electricians install and maintain industrial equipment such as substations, cranes, and many special equipment operations. MEA has helped electricians in oil refineries, steel mills, large printing companies and large food processing plants, as well as flour milling and commercial baking companies keep up to date with the latest electrical codes and safety practices.

We need all of these electricians plus all of the other people who supply, support, schedule and design systems for this country as well as many places around the world. Electricity is a 24-hour-a-day, 365-days-a-year essential energy source. We rely on trained and competent electrical personnel to keep the lights on, the motors turning, the businesses operating smoothly.

**Lien Rights**

View this 1-hour presentation from James Sander of Larkin Hoffman Daly & Lindgren Ltd. on how to properly administer the lien process.

**Energy Code Training**

30-minute presentation from John O’Neil, Lighting Control Specialist of Pulse Products: Minnesota 2015 Energy Code: Effective June 2, 2015, the new MN 2015 Energy Code is being enforced. Since the last code update, ASHRAE 90.1 2004, the new energy code has many additional requirements. This presentation describes the additional needs of the Lighting Controls per the State Energy Code. Special attention should be given to Mandatory requirements. Note, this code does not require receptacle control.

ASHRAE 90.1 2010: LEED does not recognize the MN 2015 Energy Code for use with LEED certified buildings. The State Energy Code allows the use of the ASHRAE 90.1 2004 in lieu of the State Code. This code is unabridged so you must meet all code requirements without exception. This energy code requires receptacle controls. This code must be followed for any LEED Certified Building.

**Property Assessed Clean Energy**

View this half-hour presentation from Peter Lindstrom at Clean Energy Resource Source on how to help finance energy efficiency or renewable energy projects.

**AWAIR - Safety Manual**

View this half-hour presentation from Andy Smokon on how to use your AWAIR manual to ensure compliance.

**Employee Handbook Webinar**

An employee handbook is the first place many employees learn policies and procedures. It is important to keep these documents up-to-date and easy to understand. 45-minute webinar presented by Kate Bischoff (attorney at Zelle LLP).

**New FLSA Overtime Regulations**

The new FLSA regulations that will soon be implemented are big and require action. While the debate rages as to what the actual salary threshold will be, employers would be wise to start planning how the new regulations will affect them and their employees. 50-minute webinar from Kate Bischoff on how to prepare for this change. FREE

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$7 Million in Lighting Rebates Available for 2017

Start ramping up business for the new year with the services and rebates offered through the One-Stop Efficiency Shop®. In 2017, One-Stop will offer $7 million in rebates to participating businesses.

One-Stop is a lighting program that offers significant rebates to qualified businesses in the Minnesota service territory of Xcel Energy. The program was recently approved through 2019. In the past year, One-Stop provided rebates to more than 2,600 participating businesses and generated approximately $31 million in labor and materials for local electricians and lighting distributors.

Our goal is to supply you with the tools you need to provide your customers with a cost-effective, high-quality lighting system that is suitable for their space and minimizes their energy use. In addition to significant rebates that cover up to 60% of a project's cost, One-Stop also offers below market-rate financing and completes and submits all program paperwork for you. Financing options include a 0% loan for qualified nonprofits.

If you would like more information about the program or to find out if your customers are eligible for rebates, please contact Cindy Kelly at 612-244-2427 or ckelly@mncee.org.

MEA MISSION STATEMENT

MEA provides leadership in partnering between contractors, government employees and consumers to promote quality construction built safely, on time, on budget and at a fair price and profit.

Important Notice: The information in this newsletter is intended to alert you to changes in laws, regulations, or trends that can affect your business. The information in MEA News is NOT tax, accounting, or legal advice. Since each company has different needs, it is important that you get the appropriate professional advice if you think your company will be affected. Please be sure to call us if you have any questions.
Fueling Program

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