

# Welcome to Dakota Electric Association



Your Touchstone Energy® Partner 

The Touchstone Energy logo consists of three stylized human figures in red, blue, and orange, standing on a green curved base, symbolizing community and energy.

Membership Information Packet

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# Welcome to Dakota Electric Association

Dakota Electric Association is a nonprofit, member-owned electric distribution system serving a 507 square-mile territory that includes Dakota County and parts of Scott, Goodhue and Rice Counties. Electric cooperatives like Dakota Electric were initiated during the 1930s by farmers and their rural neighbors.

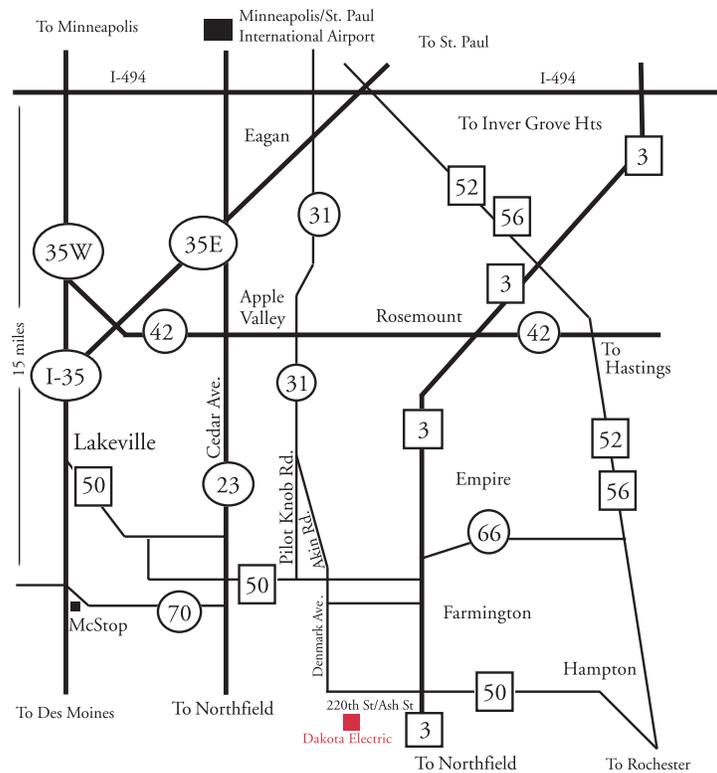
Dakota Electric is the second largest electric cooperative in Minnesota and ranks among the 25 largest cooperatives nationally.

When you receive electric service from Dakota Electric, you become a voting member of the cooperative and are eligible to participate in the cooperative's business affairs. Each year at our annual meeting members are elected to serve on a board of directors. The elected board sets the policies governing the business practices of the cooperative.

Dakota Electric is regulated by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Sections within this booklet review PUC rules and guidelines regarding service, fees and policies that regulated utilities and their consumers must follow.

## Location

Dakota Electric is located at 4300 220th Street West, Farmington, MN 55024.



# Billing Information

## Meter Reading & Estimated Billings

Normally, a meter reader or an automated meter reading device reads your meter each month. The term “month” means the period between two consecutive meter reading dates and is as close as possible to thirty-day (30) intervals.

In some instances, Dakota Electric may also send estimated bills without reading meters. Estimated bills will be based on the normal consumption for a corresponding period during the preceding months.

Only in unusual cases, will more than two (2) consecutive estimated bills be rendered.

If an estimated bill appears abnormal after an actual meter reading is obtained, the bill for the entire period may be recalculated to reflect the actual use during the entire period.

## Meter Testing

Dakota Electric:

1. Will test any member’s meter promptly upon request and payment of, or agreement to pay, a meter test charge. If the meter is found to be more than two percent (2%) fast, the test fee will be refunded, and billing adjustments made.
2. Will make a written report of the requested meter test results to the member.

## Bill Collections

Your electric bill will show the amount due and the date that payment is due to avoid late payment charges. Please return the top portion of your bill with the monthly payment to ensure the correct account is credited.

If payment is not received before the next bill is printed, 1.5 percent of the unpaid balance or \$1.00, whichever is greater, will be assessed on the next electric bill.

Any over-payments are credited to your next electric bill.

## Payment Options

For more information on our payment options, please visit our Web site at [dakotaelectric.com](http://dakotaelectric.com). You may also call 651-463-6212 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 212.

### 1. QuikPay

QuikPay online billing offers members the convenience of viewing and paying their bill online.

### 2. Pay by Credit Card

Dakota Electric offers payment by credit card, debit card or electronic check 24 hours a day online or by telephone at 1-888-935-4850. Convenience fees may apply.

### **3. Electronic Funds Transfer**

Dakota Electric offers Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). Enrollment in this plan allows members to pay their bills by automatic electronic funds transfer from any bank, savings and loan or credit union checking or savings account they designate.

### **4. Budget Billing**

Budget Billing allows residential members to equalize monthly payments. Your budget payment amount is reviewed periodically and, if necessary, adjusted to reflect your energy usage or changes in the cost of electricity.

### **5. By Check**

Dakota Electric accepts checks for payment of electric bills. If a question arises as to the validity of a personal check, cash or money order may be required. Second party checks will not be accepted. If a check is not honored because of “insufficient funds” or for any other reason, a service charge will be assessed and the account status will be the same as if no payment had been made. If a payment is made by personal check in order to avoid service termination, and the check is not honored, service may be disconnected after a 24-hour notification.

### **6. In Person**

Payments are accepted in Dakota Electric’s lobby between 7 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday and at the drive-up window between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., Monday through Friday.

### **7. By Mail**

Members can mail payments to Dakota Electric, P.O. Box 64427, St. Paul, MN 55164-0427. For your convenience, a return envelope is provided with your monthly statement. Please enclose the top portion of the billing statement with your payment.

### **8. Drop Box**

For your convenience, Dakota Electric maintains a drop box at the Farmington headquarters. Payments received in the drop box are applied the next working day.

## **Resource and Tax Adjustment**

Minnesota law allows the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to authorize the automatic pass-through of increases in certain expenses.

You will notice a line item on your electric bill that reads “Resource and Tax Adjustment.” The amount listed on this line reflects changes in cost for wholesale power, conservation program spending and resulting savings, and net changes in property taxes.

Each month the amount appearing on this line will vary according to the amount of energy you consumed that month.

If you wish to know the cost and calculations of the factors that were used to develop the “Resource and Tax Adjustment” appearing on your electric bill, you may contact a Dakota Electric member service representative at (651) 463-6212 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 212.

## **Charge for Service Calls**

When Dakota Electric sends a crew to a member's premise on a service call and they find the trouble is not with Dakota Electric's equipment, a service charge will be assessed. Every effort shall be made to clarify the problem by telephone before Dakota Electric makes a trip to the location.

## **Notice of Disconnection**

Dakota Electric sends disconnection notices by first class mail. The notice provides a specific date when payment must be received to prevent service from being disconnected.

## **Disconnection of Service**

If Dakota Electric is not contacted by a member who has received a Notice of Disconnection, one attempt may be made to contact the customer by telephone. If no contact is made, a Dakota Electric employee will make a final attempt to contact the member at the place of service. If no contact is made, or if contact is made but no payment agreement reached, service may be disconnected.

Dakota Electric may disconnect service to any member, without notice, for unauthorized use of Dakota Electric equipment, or in the event of tampering with the cooperative's equipment.

If an order to disconnect service has been issued and the cooperative employee arrives at the premise, he/she must accept payment of the delinquent bill. Payment will be necessary to avoid terminating service.

## **Reconnection of Service After Disconnection for Non-Payment**

If service has been disconnected because of non-payment of the electric bill, service charges based on the cost to restore service will be assessed before service is restored. This cost will be higher if reconnection is required after business hours. Reconnections will be completed Monday - Friday 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Any reconnection requests received after that time will be completed on the following business day.

If service has been disconnected, payment must be in the office before the order will be given to restore service. Cash, money order or credit card payment will be required. A member is required to pay all past due energy bills, a deposit and reconnection fee before service will be restored.

## **Disconnection Waiver**

You may ask Dakota Electric to delay service disconnection. If the cooperative refuses the request, you may apply to the PUC for emergency status. If the PUC determines the member has a probable claim in the dispute and that hardship may result from disconnection, it may order continuance of service for a period not to exceed thirty (30) days.

## **Deposits**

Dakota Electric will not require a deposit or a guarantee of payment based upon income, home ownership, residential location, employment tenure, nature of occupation, race, color, creed, sex, marital status, age, national origin, or any other criterion which does not bear a reasonable relationship to the assurance of payment authorized by PUC rules.

If your service has been disconnected because of non-payment, it is Dakota Electric's policy to collect a deposit equal to an average of two (2) months' electric bills. This deposit will be assessed and must be paid prior to the time service is restored.

If you leave Dakota Electric's service area and have an unpaid balance, a deposit equal to an average of two (2) months' electric bills of the previous occupant may be assessed if you return and request service. This deposit is in addition to full payment of your previously unpaid balance.

If you maintain a good payment record for twelve (12) consecutive months, the deposit will be refunded per Minnesota rules 7820.4500, subpart 1. All deposits are reviewed monthly.

Deposits plus interest will be applied to final bills of members leaving Dakota Electric's service area; any credit balance will be refunded to the member.

Per Minnesota rule 7820.4500, subpart 2., Dakota Electric Association may accept, in lieu of a deposit, a contract signed by a guarantor satisfactory to the utility whereby payment of a specified sum not exceeding the deposit requirement is guaranteed.

## **Credit History**

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission defines "Good Credit" as "A Customer who, within the last 12 months, has not had their service disconnected for non-payment of a bill and has not been liable for disconnect for non-payment of a bill which is not in dispute, shall be deemed to have established good credit."

Dakota Electric will not use any credit reports that do not reflect the purchase of utility services to determine your past credit history without your written permission. Any credit report used will be mailed to you for your review. If you refuse the use of a credit report (other than a utility credit report), Dakota Electric's review of your credit history will not be affected.

## **Programs and Services**

### **Helping Neighbors<sup>®</sup>**

Since 1994, Dakota Electric has participated in the Helping Neighbors<sup>®</sup> program. Proceeds from this program are directed to local fuel assistance agencies and will help area residents meet their monthly energy bills.

Members may choose to make a monthly contribution. The donation amount will appear on your monthly bill. One-time donations can be made by check at any time. Donations to this program are tax deductible. Donation cards will be sent out once a year. If you would like to receive more information on this program, please call (651) 463-6212 or 1-800-874-3409 or visit [www.dakotaelectric.com](http://www.dakotaelectric.com) and enroll online.

### **Regulation**

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission regulates this utility and is available for mediation upon written request. Contact them at:

**Minnesota Public Utilities Commission**  
Consumer Affairs Office  
121 Seventh Place East, Suite 350  
St. Paul, MN 55101-2147

## **Gopher State One Call**

Home owners and businesses planning to dig during landscaping or construction are required to call Gopher State One Call at least two working days before digging so the center can alert utility companies which may have pipes or cables buried in the area.

Failure to call is a misdemeanor that can result in liability to the utility companies for damages, if any result. Anyone disrupting utility facilities and service will be liable for the cost of any lost product under the law.

The phone call to Gopher State One Call is free and the locations service is free. The number is 811, (651) 454-0002 or 1-800-252-1166.

The center's regular hours are 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Calls pertaining to genuine emergencies are accepted at any time, 365 days per year.

## **Tree Trimming**

If a tree or shrub appears close to a power line, do not attempt to prune it yourself. Call Dakota Electric at (651) 463-6287 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 287, or e-mail [trees@dakotaelectric.com](mailto:trees@dakotaelectric.com) for assistance and recommendations.

Property owners can help Dakota Electric maintain line access and clearance by planning ahead and following the guidelines established by the cooperative, which in turn, increases the safety and reliability of your electric service. Contact Dakota Electric at (651) 463-6287 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 287 for your free copy of the "Planting and Pruning Guide."

## **Streetlights**

Dakota Electric is responsible for maintaining more than 15,000 streetlights throughout the service territory. If you notice a streetlight is damaged or not working, we encourage you to report it during business hours by calling 651-463-6287 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 287 or e-mail [streetlights@dakotaelectric.com](mailto:streetlights@dakotaelectric.com). If you notice a damaged or fallen streetlight after business hours, please call our 24-hour outage and emergency service line at 651-463-6201.

## **Publications & Information**

Dakota Electric members receive *Circuits* newsletter each month as part of their annual membership. Dakota Electric publishes *Circuits* monthly, and it contains information about energy saving programs, current events and issues at the cooperative. Reading this publication will help keep you up-to-date about issues facing your cooperative. Current and previous issues of *Circuits* can also be viewed on our website at [www.dakotaelectric.com](http://www.dakotaelectric.com).

Your monthly bills may contain inserts about energy conservation programs or other important member-related information. Look on your bill for special messages from Dakota Electric regarding programs and activities.

## **C & I Energy Group**

Dakota Electric Association invites business members to become involved in the Commercial and Industrial Energy Group. The purpose of this group is to keep members informed on energy matters. The C & I Energy Group meets twice a year and is open to all Dakota Electric commercial and industrial members. Those interested in becoming a part of the C & I Energy Group should contact Dakota Electric at (651) 463-6243 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 243.

## **Energy Conservation Programs**

Dakota Electric offers several money-saving conservation programs to our residential, commercial and industrial members. You can get more information about these programs by visiting our Web site at [www.dakotaelectric.com](http://www.dakotaelectric.com) or calling (651) 463-6243 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 243.

## **General Information**

### **Membership Equity**

The equity of an electric cooperative is owned entirely by the members of the cooperative. Members contribute the equity by paying their bills and generating margins each year (money left over after expenses are paid). Each year these margins are allocated to each member-owner based on how much electricity was purchased from Dakota Electric. The equity is returned to members over time through the payment of capital credits. Capital credits are also known as patronage capital or owners' equity.

Each year the board of directors reviews Dakota Electric's financial position and determines whether it is financially prudent to pay capital credits.

### **Annual Meeting**

Dakota Electric members meet annually to elect board members and discuss the business of the cooperative. Reports are presented by the president, treasurer, Great River Energy director, attorney and the president/CEO.

Look for more information about the annual meeting in *Circuits* newsletter and on Dakota Electric's Web site, [www.dakotaelectric.com](http://www.dakotaelectric.com). For additional information about the meeting, please call Dakota Electric at (651) 463-6212.

### **Office Hours**

Dakota Electric's office is open from 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Our general information number is (651) 463-6212. Member service representatives are available from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Members calling long distance should use 1-800-874-3409. Hearing impaired members may call our Telecommunications Device for the hearing impaired (TDD) at (651) 463-6144.

For your convenience, a drive-up payment window is located at the office. Window hours are 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The office is closed to observe New Year's Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, and the Friday after Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day.

Our System Control Center is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year to respond to outage and emergency calls.

## Important Phone Numbers

Outage & Emergency Service .....	651-463-6201 or 1-800-430-9722
Past Due Accounts .....	651-463-6212
Moving.....	651-463-6212
Bill Inquiries/Energy Use Information .....	651-463-6212
Tree Trimming .....	651-463-6287
Streetlight Repair .....	651-463-6287
Conservation & Energy Efficiency Programs.....	651-463-6243
Residential Energy Audits.....	651-463-6243
Water Heating .....	651-463-6243
Electric Heat.....	651-463-6243
Cycled Air Conditioning® .....	651-463-6212
Commercial Energy Audits.....	651-463-6243
Capital Credits .....	651-463-6212
General Information.....	651-463-6212
(Long distance) .....	1-800-874-3409
Hearing Impaired (TDD) .....	651-463-6144
Job Line.....	651-463-6129
Internet Address .....	<a href="http://www.dakotaelectric.com">www.dakotaelectric.com</a>
Email .....	<a href="mailto:customerservice@dakotaelectric.com">customerservice@dakotaelectric.com</a>

## Underground Cable Locations: Gopher State One Call

Twin Cities Area .....	651-454-0002
(Long distance) .....	1-800-252-1166
Internet .....	<a href="http://www.gopherstateonecall.org">www.gopherstateonecall.org</a>

## Service Requests

### 1. New service

To request installation of a new electric service, please call (651) 463-6247 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 247. Real estate developers should contact co-op representatives at (651) 463-6373 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 373.

### 2. Moving

To have an existing account put into your name, call (651) 463-6212 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 212 or visit our Web site at [www.dakotaelectric.com](http://www.dakotaelectric.com) to complete a form online.

### 3. Upgrading service

Consult with Dakota Electric service representatives at (651) 463-6247 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 247 prior to designing or making alterations to electrical installations.

### 4. Line and facility relocation

Contact Dakota Electric at (651) 463-6247 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 247 if you are planning a project that may necessitate relocation of Dakota Electric's facilities.

### 5. Temporary service

The member receiving temporary service will be charged the regular rates applicable to the service rendered. Contact Dakota Electric at (651) 463-6247 or 1-800-874-3409, ext. 247.

## **In case of outages**

If your electricity goes out, check your fuses or circuit breakers. If they are okay, take a moment to check if your neighbors' homes or nearby street lights are also without power. To report an outage call (651) 463-6201 or 1-800-430-9722.

During severe weather, a power outage could be widespread and prolonged. The telephone lines may be extremely busy during major outages, and you may be routed to our automated answering system. The system can answer and process up to 32 calls simultaneously. There is no need to call again unless your neighbor's lights come back on and your service has not been restored.

If the outage affects a large number of members, we will send out updates to local media (e.g. WCCO AM 830) and put updates on our website ([www.dakotaelectric.com](http://www.dakotaelectric.com)). You can visit our website, listen to local radio stations or visit local newspaper websites for updates regarding the status of larger outages.

## **Continuity of Service**

Dakota Electric Association will endeavor to provide continuous service but does not guarantee an uninterrupted or undisturbed supply of electric service. The Cooperative will not be responsible for any loss or damage resulting from the interruption or disturbance of service for any cause other than gross negligence of the Cooperative. The Cooperative reserves the right without previously notifying the member to temporarily interrupt service for construction, inspection, repairs, emergency operations, shortages in power supply, safety and State or National emergencies. The Cooperative will not be liable in any event for any loss of profits or other consequential damages resulting from the use of service or any interruption or disturbance of service.

## **In-Home Life Support Equipment**

If someone in your household depends on in-home life support equipment, please notify us immediately. Dakota Electric maintains a record of members who use critical life support systems, and to the extent practical, Dakota Electric gives consideration to medical emergency status when restoring service. Because some interruptions in service are unavoidable and in some cases may last longer than some members can be without power, we urge members with special medical needs to make necessary arrangements for auxiliary power for any vital life-support equipment.

Members with special life support needs must complete a Certification of Special Medical Needs document, certified by a medical doctor confirming the medical emergency, and return it to Dakota Electric Association. To obtain a Certification of Special Medical Needs document, contact Dakota Electric at 651-463-6212.

Members can return completed Certification of Special Medical Needs by mail or fax.

Mail to:  
Dakota Electric Association  
Attn: Leads  
4300 220th Street West  
Farmington, MN 55024

Fax to:  
651-463-6256

Members are urged to contact Dakota Electric if the medical situation no longer exists.

## **Cold Weather Rule Protection**

Some members find it hard to pay their utility bills in the winter. The State of Minnesota set up the Cold Weather Rule to protect residential, heat-affected members, who are unable to pay their utility bills, from disconnection of service between October 15 and April 15.

### **Avoiding Disconnection**

The Cold Weather Rule does not forbid winter shut off. If you receive a shut off notice this winter, you must act promptly and call Dakota Electric at 651-463-6212 to apply for Cold Weather Rule protection and set up a payment plan.

Your service will be subject to disconnection without further notice if you do not make the agreed upon payments. If you cannot keep your original payment plan, call Dakota Electric immediately and make a new payment plan to avoid disconnection.

### **Reconnection**

If your power is disconnected on October 15 when the Cold Weather Rule takes affect, you can have your power reconnected by calling Dakota Electric at 651-463-6212 to set up a payment plan. You must keep your payment plan to avoid future disconnection. Call Dakota Electric immediately if you cannot keep your payment plan and make a new payment plan to avoid disconnection.

### **Payment Agreements**

If your household income is:

- at or below 50 percent of the state median income, you are not required to pay more than ten percent of your monthly household income.
- more than 50 percent of the state median income, you may make a payment plan with Dakota Electric Association.

Most Cold Weather Rule payment plans last until April 15 unless you make other arrangements with Dakota Electric. Your service could be shut off if you have a past-due balance on April 15 and do not make and keep a new payment plan.

### **Right to Appeal**

If you and Dakota Electric cannot agree on a payment plan, you have ten days to appeal to the Public Utilities Commission. The Commission will help you set up a payment plan, and your service will stay on during the appeal process.

### **Notice of Proposed Shut Off**

If you receive a Shut Off Notice, you will also receive:

- Information on your rights and responsibilities
- Information on ways to reduce energy use
- A list of agencies that can help pay utility bills
- A list of weatherization providers

### **Third Party Notice**

Third Party Notice applies to all members and is designed to notify the members and a third party, such as a friend, relative, church or community agency, that a shut-off notice has been sent. The third party can receive and give information about the member and arrange payment plans with Dakota Electric for the member. The third party is not responsible for payment.

### **Member Service Offices**

Dakota Electric Association members may call the member service department at (651) 463-6212 or e-mail customerservice@dakotaelectric.com

### **Disputes**

If you tell Dakota Electric before your service is disconnected that part of the bill or part of the service rendered is in dispute, Dakota Electric will investigate your complaint and report the results to you in an attempt to correct the problem. Service will not be disconnected during the investigation or before you receive a written report of the results.

Members must pay the bill in full when they receive the findings of the utility. If a dispute is not satisfactorily resolved, you must submit the entire payment but may designate the disputed portion to be put in escrow. To submit a payment in escrow you must complete the “escrow payment form” provided by Dakota Electric, and explain, in the space provided, why no resolution could be reached.

The “escrow payment form” is a three-part form: one copy is kept by Dakota Electric; one copy is for you; and one copy is sent by you to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, where it is considered the same as the filing of an informal complaint against Dakota Electric.

### **Member Complaints & Procedures**

Dakota Electric follows guidelines set by state law and regulations of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission for dealing with member complaints. For more detailed information please inquire about Minnesota Public Utilities Commission regulations 7820.0300 and 7820.2700 to 7820.3000.

During normal working hours Dakota Electric has representatives available to assist you with questions or complaints.

If a complaint cannot be resolved immediately, a Dakota Electric employee shall attempt to contact you within five (5) working days of your first call, and once every fourteen (14) days thereafter to advise you of the status of the investigation. Contacts will continue until the complaint is resolved or Dakota Electric informs you of the results of the investigation and its conclusion in the matter, or until you file a written complaint with the Public Utilities Commission or the courts.

Per Minnesota rule 7820.3000, Dakota Electric Association shall not be obligated to suspend discontinuance of service upon filing for review with the commission, unless the customer shall pay when due, all current bills rendered during the pendency. If, following the first filing for review with the commission, the same customer or any other person files for a subsequent review by the commission pertaining to the same account, such subsequent filings shall not relieve the customer from the obligations to pay for service rendered after the first filing. If subsequent requests for review are filed during the pendency of the first review, all designated disputed payment or portions thereof made after the first filing shall be considered to be made into escrow.

### **Statement of Nondiscrimination**

Dakota Electric Association is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer. It is Dakota Electric's policy to recruit, hire, train and promote individuals and to administer all personnel actions without regard to race, marital status, veteran status, and status with regard to public assistance or any other legally protected status in accordance with applicable law.

Dakota Electric maintains an affirmative action program, which will afford all applicants and employees equal employment opportunities. Dakota Electric will follow this program to evaluate objectively the utilization of qualified female, minority and disabled applicants and personnel in all occupational categories in compliance with the law.