

LOCALNEWS

SEPTEMBER CHIEFS REPORT

Chief reports increase in ambulance runs

Reports by the International Falls police and fire chiefs were presented Oct. 6 to the Falls City Council.

Falls Fire Chief Adam Mannausau provided a report that also includes the Falls Ambulance Service, of which he also serves as chief.

Mannausau said the 152 ambulance calls in September represented twice as many as in September 2013, when 67 calls were received. Of the 152 calls, 95 came in as 911 calls, he said.

“That’s significant for us,” he told the council.

He added a new ambulance is expected to arrive in mid-October.

“We’re running the wheels off the ambulance we have,” he said.

Meanwhile, he reported September brought four fire calls, with two, involving a dryer and a vehicle, in the city. He said other two were rural responses, one involving a hazardous materials incident with the Koochiching County Sheriff’s Office and one vehicle rollover with extrication.

Mannausau said firefighters attended pump operator and rope rescue classes, and conducted hose testing during September.

Police

Falls Police Chief Mike Musich provided an activity report for September which noted school patrols started



Adam Mannausau



Mike Musich

for the year, which he called a priority for the department. He said Dane Olson will serve as the juvenile officer, and he said officers are called to Falls High School nearly every day for a variety of reasons.

He also said parking issues in residential areas were addressed during the month.

Musich reported officers made 606 contacts with the public during September. He broke that number down by activity: 38 general calls for service, 29 medical assists, 11 agency assists, seven attempts to local people, 41 traffic stops, 25 animal-related calls and 113 initial complaint reports, which are services recorded for future reference.

Animal-related calls involved dogs, cats and a wolf, he said, adding calls about a wolf that has been seen within the city limits had declined in recent weeks.

In addition, he reported he and other officers had attended several meetings during the month.

Minnesota’s Cold Weather Rule starts today

Customers can seek protection and apply for heating assistance

COMMERCE STAFF REPORT

As the heating season kicks in, the Minnesota Department of Commerce and the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission encourage Minnesotans to contact their utilities now to learn more about the Cold Weather Rule protection to keep homes heated all winter long, and avoid disconnection.

Minnesota’s Cold Weather Rule takes effect today and protects residential utility customers from having their heat shut off through April 15, 2015. To prevent heating disconnection, customers must contact their utility to establish and maintain a monthly payment plan.

“The Cold-Weather Rule and energy assistance helps Minnesota families that struggle financially with utility heating costs each winter, especially during bitterly cold winters like last year,” said Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman. “No Minnesotan should be left out in the cold.”

The Cold Weather Rule helps customers who heat their homes with natural gas or electricity to avoid shut-off during the winter months. To be eligible, customers must contact their utility to work out a payment plan and must make the payments. Customers who have a combined household income at or below 50 percent of the state median income (\$44,912 for a family of four) are not required to pay more than 10 percent of household income; others are also eligible to negotiate a payment plan. Households that need to re-connect

for winter should contact their utility now to take advantage of the payment options.

“The Cold Weather Rule is a safeguard for the most vulnerable Minnesotans during our frigid winters,” said PUC Chair Beverly Jones Heydinger. “It ensures that households in need are safe, warm, and healthy. By working out a payment plan with their utility, Minnesota families can keep the heat on while they face financial challenges.”

Minnesota consumers using delivered fuels such as fuel oil, propane, or wood to heat their homes are not covered by the Cold Weather Rule. However, they are also encouraged to contact the companies that serve them to discuss payment options if they are concerned about their ability to pay for fuel. For example, a new law requires propane distributors to offer all customers a budget plan.

More information on the Cold Weather Rule is available at the PUC website or by calling 651-296-0406 or 800-657-3782.

Minnesota’s Energy Assistance Program

In addition to the Cold Weather Rule, Minnesota offers the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP or the Energy Assistance Program (EAP) to help pay home heating costs. The Commerce Department administers LIHEAP in part-



Mike Rothman

nership with 31 local service providers throughout the state. LIHEAP is federally funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program helps renters and homeowners earning at or below 50 percent of the state’s median income (\$44,912 for a family of four) obtain grant money to help pay their heating bills.

The average annual grant per household last year was \$500. Households with seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, and children are especially encouraged to apply. Applications were recently sent to households that qualified for energy assistance last year; others who may qualify are encouraged to apply. To apply, contact the local service provider in your county by calling 1-800-657-3710 or visit the Energy Assistance Program section on the Division of Energy Resources website.

While Minnesota consumers using delivered fuels such as fuel oil, propane, or wood to heat their homes are eligible for EAP grants even though they are not covered by the Cold Weather Rule.

Minnesota’s Weather Assistance Program

The Commerce Department also administers the Weatherization Assistance Program, a companion program of EAP. The program provides cost-effective energy conservation measures to reduce energy costs for low-income households. Minnesotans who meet the income guidelines for weatherization may receive weatherization services; they may also receive ad-

ditional assistance from the utilities. Both homeowners and renters may apply for weatherization.

Other forms of assistance may be available through county social service programs, community-based organizations, and non-profit agencies. For a list of resources, visit the Stay Warm Minnesota website.

Energy-saving tips

The Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources provides a wide range of energy-saving information that every household can use to help control heating costs. Some basic no-cost and low-cost energy-saving recommendations include:

■ Weather strip and caulk windows and doors to eliminate air infiltration.

■ Cover drafty windows with tightly sealed plastic to keep the warm air in.

■ Open curtains and blinds on south-facing windows to let the sun in during the day to naturally heat your home.

■ Seal air leaks to prevent cold air infiltration through chimneys, vents, pipes, and wires that penetrate walls, ceilings, and attics.

■ Close your fireplace damper when a fire is not in use to prevent warm air from escaping.

■ Maintain your heating system. Have annual furnace or boiler inspections, clean or replace furnace filters regularly, and consider replacing old heating systems with more efficient ENERGY STAR® models.

■ Use a programmable thermostat to automatically turn down the heat at night and when you’re not at home.

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