



# BRAINERD PUBLIC UTILITIES

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## Unauthorized Use of Utility Meters

BPU\_POL\_2003-04

Latest Revision/Effective Date: February 24, 2026

Original Adoption Date: October 28, 2003

### I. Purpose

To establish standards and penalties addressing unauthorized use, tampering, bypassing, or interference with utility meters in order to protect public infrastructure, ensure accurate billing, maintain system integrity, and promote equitable treatment of all utility customers.

### II. Scope

This policy applies to all residential and commercial utility accounts served by Brainerd Public Utilities.

### III. Definitions

**Administrative Fee:** A charge assessed to recover costs incurred by the utility in investigating, documenting, and processing meter tampering or unauthorized use.

**Estimated Unmetered Consumption:** The calculated amount of utility usage not properly recorded due to tampering, bypassing, malfunction, or unauthorized use. Estimates may be based on historical consumption, comparable usage, engineering calculations, or other reasonable methodologies.

**Meter Tampering:** Any unauthorized action that alters, damages, adjusts, or interferes with a utility meter, seal, wiring, or associated equipment in a manner that affects accurate measurement of utility service.

**Meter Bypassing:** The act of diverting utility service around a meter or otherwise preventing accurate measurement of consumption.

**Metering Team:** Utility staff responsible for installation, inspection, maintenance, testing, and investigation of utility meters and associated equipment.

**Unauthorized Use:** The use of utility service without proper authorization, active account status, or accurate metering, including service obtained through tampering, bypassing, or reconnection without approval.

**Utility Meter:** Any device or equipment used to measure consumption of electric, water, wastewater, or other utility services provided by the utility.

**Violation:** A confirmed instance of meter tampering, bypassing, unauthorized use, or interference with utility metering equipment.

**IV. Policy Statement**

BPU will administer a zero-tolerance program for unauthorized use of utility meters.

When a customer of Brainerd Public Utilities (BPU) deliberately commits, authorizes, attempts, solicits, aids, or abets bypassing, tampering, unauthorized connection, or unauthorized metering that results in damages to the utility; or knowingly receives service provided as a result of bypassing, tampering, unauthorized connection, or unauthorized metering, BPU has the authority to bring civil or criminal action per MN Statute 325E.026.

BPU will charge a three-month average bill as a deposit to the customer receiving illegal power for this utility meter, as well as the energy charges for the period of illegal tampering, the charges described below, a tampering fee, and any other charges BPU deems necessary.

BPU may recover double the costs of the actual billing charges incurred, including the costs and expenses for investigation, disconnection, reconnection, service calls, equipment and employees. Trial costs and witness fees for pursuing possible legal action will also be charged to the customer.

**V. Procedures**

Upon notification or detection of suspected meter tampering, bypassing, or unauthorized use, the Metering team shall initiate an investigation. The investigation may include physical inspection of the meter and associated equipment, verification of seals and connections, review of historical consumption data, and documentation of findings, including photographs when appropriate. If tampering or unauthorized use is confirmed, the Metering team shall document the nature of the violation and, when reasonably possible, determine the estimated duration of the unauthorized use.

All investigative findings and supporting documentation shall be forwarded to the Billing Specialist. The Billing Specialist shall calculate the estimated unmetered consumption based on historical usage, comparable usage, or other reasonable calculation methods, and shall assess all applicable charges in accordance with the approved fee schedule and the policy statement. Such charges may include estimated utility usage, administrative fees, penalties, and meter repair or replacement costs.

Service disconnection may occur if warranted under existing utility policies or if continued unauthorized use presents a safety or operational concern.

**VI. Roles and Responsibilities**

The metering team will assess and investigate any tampering notifications. The billing specialist will calculate, assess and apply any charges necessary or identified from the investigation.

**VII. Compliance and References**

Minnesota [§325E.026](#)

**VIII. Associated Forms and Attachments**

None.

**IX. Review and Update Schedule**

This policy will be reviewed as statute changes arise.

**Amended: February 24, 2026.**

**X. Approval and Authority**

The Brainerd Public Utilities Commission approved this policy on February 24, 2026.