

Community OUTREACH

News to the Neighborhoods from Memphis Light, Gas and Water Division

January/February 2024

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MLGW's ambitious plan to trim trees and curb power outages

Clearing power lines has become a higher priority for MLGW. In normal circumstances, the tree trimming work is done in three-year cycles, but the pandemic, severe storms and contractors failing to meet expectations have left some areas uncleared for six or seven years. As a result, tree-related power outages are four times higher than normal. About 60% of MLGW power outages are caused by trees.

In response, MLGW has developed a five-year plan to catch up on long-neglected tree trimming across Shelby County – part of larger, multimillion-dollar initiative to improve the reliability and resilience of the utility's aging electrical distribution system. This is a \$228 million plan that is part of a large electricity distribution upgrade with a needed rate hike.

Funding for the larger initiative includes a 12% electricity rate hike, recently approved by the Memphis City Council. Critics say some customers can't afford the increase (4% spread over three years), but MLGW knows it is a sound investment. MLGW will raise \$178 million in new revenue that, coupled with upcoming bond sales, will finance a range of improvements, including replacing substation transformers, circuit breakers and wooden poles, and modernizing the power grid.

The utility's "Electric Reliability and Resilience Road Map" calls for increasing spending from \$100 million to \$228 million over five years to trim tree limbs out of the path of power lines.

The storms keep coming. From January 2022 to August 2023, more than 800,000 outages were reported due to major storms. That's the same number of outages caused by major storms in the entire preceding 10 years.

To address the backlog, MLGW has hired three companies to



clear the lines over the next five years: ABC Tree Service, Lewis Tree Service and Kendall Vegetation Service. That will nearly double the number of limb-clearing crews from 52 to more than 90.

Over the past decade, MLGW has trimmed about 8,200 of the 14,000 miles of trees along its lines. The utility fell behind when a previous contractor failed to meet expectations. Records show that MLGW completed just 40 percent of its tree-trimming goal in 2021, and just 30 percent in 2022. With the added crews, MLGW plans to trim another 7,000 miles of trees by 2025.

According to MLGW's online tree-trimming dashboard, the three contractors collectively had cleared 346 miles of tree limbs through Dec. 4. That means that in the first quarter (September, October, November) of the work year that started Sept. 1, the crews had completed nearly a fourth – 24.7% – of the utility's 1,398-mile first-year goal. The new pace should allow the utility to eventually return to its three-year cycle of tree trimming.

The rate hike is expected to cost the typical power customer an extra \$5 per month or \$60 a year. City Council Chairman Martavius Jones said that the cost seems worth it considering that ratepayers often must throw away spoiled food at considerable cost following power outages. MLGW President and CEO Doug McGowen said the investment is long overdue, saying the utility has had a "run to fail" mindset.

"We have had essentially one rate increase in 35 years, and the rate of inflation over that period of time has significantly outstripped that," McGowen said in a hallway outside the recent City Council meeting.

"And so, what we're suffering from reliability-wise is a lack of investment over time, over decades and decades and decades of time. And so that's what we're attempting to rectify here, is to put the capital into the system, modernize our electric grid, to improve both resilience and reliability so that we have a system that our customers, quite frankly, deserve."

A Thanksgiving story

A strong gas odor was reported near the Memphis Zoo on Thanksgiving Day. Antonon Morgan, MLGW Gas Distribution South Service Center, and his crew rushed to confirm the issue. Excavating the area, they uncovered a broken fuse, but the Zoo Facilities Manager lacked a map for guidance. Lacking the necessary components needed to fix the issue, Donald Adduci, MLGW Gas Distribution-South Service Center, decided to maintain safety and control by implementing a squeeze-off technique.

The next day, the components needed to address the problem were still unavailable to crews, prompting Craig Powers, MLGW Gas Matrix Manager Office, to drive to Jackson Energy Authority in Jackson, TN, to collect 3" polyethylene (PE) sticks of pipe and fittings needed to fix the problem. The issue was addressed, and gas services were restored by 10:30 p.m. Kudos to Craig, Antonon, Don and their crews for working during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Excellent work!



The Top 50 Women Leaders of Tennessee for 2023

MLGW's Lashell Vaughn honored

Lashell Vaughn, Vice President and Chief Information Officer at MLGW, has been named one of the Top 50 Women Leaders of Tennessee for 2023. She is ranked 19th in the listing. Vaughn joined MLGW in 2018; she is responsible for managing information technology services, data security, client services, and enterprise resources support.



2023–2024 STEM program kick-off

The MLGW STEM Educational Support program consists of 40 students in grades 3rd to 5th from Memphis area schools, namely Binghampton Christian Academy, Cummings Elementary, John P. Freeman K-8 Optional School and Raleigh-Bartlett Meadows Elementary. The program, which runs from October 2023 to May 2024, celebrated its kick-off recently, at MLGW University, with the participation of over 70 students, parents, and MLGW volunteers. Coordinators Capricious Westbrook and Ericka Hughes, of MLGW Human Performance, orchestrated engaging activities focusing on critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, teamwork, confidence and fostering a spirit of curiosity for lifelong learning.

The initiative aims to introduce students to STEM-related activities and raise awareness about STEM careers globally, particularly within the utility industry.

The MLGW STEM ESP sessions are scheduled once a month on Saturdays. The specific dates for the sessions are January 10, February 17, March 23, April 20, and May 11.

MLGW's Information System Division hosts U of M students

The Memphis Light, Gas and Water's Information System (IS) Division hosted Herff College of Engineering students from the University of Memphis recently.

MLGW shared information regarding its infrastructure technology and how it serves our customers. Students also gave feedback and ideas on security compliance requirements of the utility industry.

Regina Whitley, President of the Greater Memphis IT Council, attended and participated with the delegation as well.



10 low-cost steps you can take this winter

- Caulk and weatherstrip around windows and doors to stop air leaks. Seal any gaps in floors and walls around pipes and electrical wiring.
- Change filters monthly.
- Replace incandescent bulbs with LED bulbs.
- Repair air leaks and seal and insulate heating system ductwork.
- Add insulation to your attic, crawl space and any accessible exterior walls. Add pipe insulation to the first five feet of water pipe coming from your water heater. Install light switch and electrical outlet seals on exterior walls.
- Install an ENERGY STAR® programmable thermostat appropriate for your type of heating system and set it at 68°F for heating.
- Look for the ENERGY STAR® label when replacing large or small appliances.
- Wrap your water heater with insulation or install an insulation blanket.
- Install aerating, low-flow faucets and shower heads and repair leaky faucets.
- Use power strips for home electronics and turn them off when equipment is not in use. TVs and DVD players still use power when plugged in to an outlet.



Winter homeowner safety tips for natural gas

If you have a gas stove or furnace, make sure the flame burns steady and blue. A yellow/orange tipped, dancing, hissing or shapeless flame is a sign of incomplete combustion which results in dangerous carbon monoxide build-up.

Carbon monoxide is odorless and causes nausea, headaches, dizziness and fatigue. If you suspect exposure, seek medical help immediately. Have gas appliances inspected and serviced annually, and make sure they are properly vented. Never heat your home with a gas stove; that's a fire and carbon monoxide

- hazard. Natural gas smells like rotten eggs or sulfur.
- If you smell gas:**
- Leave the area immediately.
 - Do not smoke or use anything that produces an open flame.
 - Do not operate electrical or battery powered equipment, light switches, flashlights, or any phones. A small spark could cause an explosion.
 - Call MLGW at 528-4465 or 9-1-1.

Gas pipelines: Keep your family safe

Besides being prepared for the dangers of severe weather, some knowledge about natural gas safety is critical. It is important to know how to be prepared and keep your family safe in the event of natural gas pipeline problems. Be aware of where natural gas transmission pipelines are in your area. Pipeline markers are yellow. If your home is close to a major gas-supply pipeline, you should know what to do and where to go in case of a pipeline emergency.

When warned to evacuate the area, do so immediately, especially if you smell a strong gas odor. Don't use anything electrical, especially light switches, flashlights, cell phones or landlines. Almost 60% of natural gas pipeline accidents are caused by damage from excavation or construction. Other causes include damage by vehicles or corrosion.



Whenever you plan to dig on your property, check to see where your home's underground gas lines are located, even for spring planting. Call 811 before digging in order to have your underground gas (and electrical) supply lines located and marked. Failure to do so could result in an explosion (or electrocution). Plus, it's the law. Simply call 811 at least three days before you plan to dig to arrange for a representative to come out and mark the location of your underground pipes and cables. Don't dig until they have done so. For gas appliance safety, make sure your gas appliances and furnace are properly vented and inspected annually by a licensed professional.

For more info on natural gas safety, visit mlgw.com/about/brochures.

MLGW offered "2023 Multicultural One-Stop Resource Fair"

For the second consecutive year, Memphis Light, Gas and Water partnered with Latino Memphis, Radio Ambiente, La Jefa 99.3 and Su Casa Ministries to offer the "MLGW Multicultural One-Stop Resource Fair," which took place recently at First Baptist Church Broad, 2835 Broad Ave.

From 10 a.m. until 1 p.m., attendees occupied the South parking lot of the church and MLGW security was onsite to direct traffic. After parking, the public entered the Church auditorium to take advantage of the "Multicultural One-Stop Resource Fair," where more than 30 of vendors shared information on utility assistance; legal matters; child support; expungement and driver license services; and provided weatherization kits. There were workshops on Safety in Preparedness and Nutrition, both in Spanish and English; and COVID-19 and flu vaccinations were available.

MLGW volunteers were on hand to answer questions and



distribute information on utility service, safety and savings, and giveaways such as utility kits and lightbulbs to a large crowd.

MLGW in the Community

Community outreach and volunteer programs are always part of MLGW's schedule. Some of the upcoming events that MLGW will be participating in include the following:

January 13 – Leadership Memphis/Volunteer Memphis Health and Wellness Fair, Orange Mound Community Center, 2590 Park Avenue, 10 a.m. until noon

January 13 – Leadership Memphis/Volunteer Memphis Health

- and Wellness Fair, Hollywood Community Center, 1570 Hollywood, 2 – 4 p.m.
- February 16-18** – 2024 Home Show of the Midsouth, Agricenter, various hours
- March 23** – Pearls of Wisdom Senior Group, House of Prayer Church, 4609 Knight Arnold, noon – 2 p.m.
- Community outreach and volunteer programs are always part of MLGW's schedule. If you would like MLGW to participate in your meeting, fair or festival, please complete the form at www.mlgw.com/speaker.**



Community Outreach is produced by MLGW's Corporate Communications department. If you have any questions, concerns or suggestions about Community Outreach, please call (901) 528-4820 or (901) 528-4557.

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