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News Release

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AMU Working to Correct Interference Issues with Local TV Signals

AMU Cable TV customers who have experienced interference issues with local TV stations will soon see a difference in the reception of those stations. Algona Municipal Utilities has contracted with Iowa Network Services (INS) in Des Moines to have INS provide local TV signals from the Des Moines, Mason City, and Austin, Minnesota markets to AMU via fiber. Design work has been completed and AMU is now waiting for delivery of equipment to convert the TV signals from an Internet protocol signal to a radio frequency signal so the programming can be seen on the AMU Cable TV system. The work should be completed no later than early this fall.

Up to this time, AMU has received local TV signals off-air. Prior to June 12th, 2009, TV stations broadcasted their primary signal in an analog format. Since that date the signal has been broadcast in a digital format. The signal broadcast in a digital format is subject to the same interference as a signal broadcast in an analog format. The difference is when there was interference with an analog signal it showed as static or "snow". When there is interference with a signal broadcast in a digital format it will show tiling or pixels on a TV screen or there will be no picture or audio at all. When you are watching a TV station and see "No Program" or "No Signal" flash across the screen it means AMU is no longer receiving the signal from the source or TV station.

Signals can be affected by atmospheric conditions that are occurring in Algona or at the source of the signal in Des Moines, Mason City, Austin or Mankato. Weather conditions, such as ice, fog, or humidity in Algona or at the source of the signal can cause interference. Electro-magnetic interference coming from cell phone towers, radio towers, wind towers etc. can also affect the TV signal. The FCC required TV stations to cut back the amount of power that they can broadcast their signals. The FCC said the power required to broadcast a digital signal in a market area is less than what was needed to broadcast an analog signal in the same market area. According to a chief engineer for a Des Moines TV station, "the FCC went too far in the reduction of power and the TV station can't cover the market area it once did with an analog signal."

It is possible to also get poor reception if the signal strength is too high and overload receivers at AMU. When TV signals are weakened due to atmospheric conditions, some stations have increased power causing the signal to overpower AMU equipment.

Algona Municipal Utilities
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When signal interference occurs, AMU checks its equipment to see if there is an issue. Our employees also contact the TV stations and ask if they have any issues.

“As AMU employees we understand the frustration and concerns over poor local TV reception as our employees pay for and enjoy the same service as all our customers. Since the digital transition we have been working on solutions to resolve the signal issues. Finally, we came to the conclusion that we could not fix the problem with the over-the-air signal issues and we began searching for a new source of signal. Receiving the signal from INS via fiber is the best solution,” according to AMU General Manager John Bilsten. Bilsten further said that AMU “appreciates the patience of our customers as AMU works to resolve the local TV reception issue.” “This is even more frustrating because these same over-the-air-channels that have reduced their signal power began charging us a few years ago for signal in an amount that exceeded \$50,000.00 in 2009 while providing substandard signal quality,” stated Bilsten.

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