



**Minnesota Utility Contractors Association**  
7595 Currell Blvd., #25907  
Woodbury, MN 55125  
(651) 461-1611 [www.muca.org](http://www.muca.org)

March 4, 2025

Hon. Rep. Paul Anderson, Chair,  
House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee

**VIA EMAIL**

RE: HF 47 Certification of Underground Telecommunications Installers

Chair Anderson, Rep. Schultz, and Committee Members,

The Minnesota Utility Contractors Association (MUCA) represents over 140 companies across the state that perform utility installation services. Everything from sewer, water, storm water, gas, electric, cable, telecom, and fiber optic installations.

While MUCA supports training efforts for industry, and we support and agree with the efforts in HF47 to reduce training hours required from 40 to 10, we still have strong concerns for the training requirement. Many of the training components outlined in the legislation already exist and are currently being satisfied through other industry certification programs.

There are several programs, nationally and locally, that already certify contractors for compliance with utility installation outlined in this legislation (Subd. 3, (1), i., ii., iii., iv., v., vi., etc.). We are not aware of any study, or comprehensive job task analysis performed to identify the specifics that direct or differentiate this training from what already exists.

One example is Operator Qualification (49CFR, Part 192) from the Pipeline Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA). This is a national regulation for gas installation and already covers many of the topics this bill seeks to address. MUCA's Pipelayer Certification that is required by MN Department of Labor covers many of the same topics suggested in this bill. And finally, there are also national utility locator certification programs already covering several items mentioned.

We see this effort as duplicative and placing an additional unnecessary burden on the utility construction industry that is already trained to install utilities of all kinds. We believe there is not a need for a separate, additional certification that will increase the project cost for municipalities and increase the burden for Minnesota taxpayers.

MUCA offers our experience and expertise as a resource to answer any questions or discuss any concerns regarding underground utilities and the utility construction industry.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Stephanie Menning'.

Stephanie Menning, CAE, IOM  
Executive Director, MUCA

---

**OUR MISSION**

To promote the underground utility industry by  
providing safety training, continuing education,  
scholarships and legislative relations.

**OUR VALUES**

Honest Communications  
Transparent Leadership  
Authentic Engagement



March 4, 2025

Minnesota State Capitol  
Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee  
Capitol Room G3  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

RE: House File 47

Modifying provisions governing the certification of underground telecommunications installers

Dear Chair Anderson, Rep. Schultz, and members of the committee,

CenterPoint Energy is Minnesota's largest natural gas utility. We proudly serve 920,000 residential and business customers with safe, reliable and resilient energy solutions through approximately 14,000 miles of pipelines. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on this bill.

CenterPoint Energy has concerns on House File 47, as we have seen a substantial increase in strikes from broadband installation and see merit in the education and certification that this statute established. The amount of telecommunication installation is growing rapidly, and so is the damage from installation.

We appreciate the authors amendment that strike lines 2.1 and 2.2. As there should not be an exemption regardless of depth. Utility infrastructure can be present at any depth. While each are installed at certain depths, the depth can change over time due to erosion or grade changes. Safely hand digging to find the facilities before crossing them, regardless of depth, is required. Having safety-qualified personnel helps reduce the risk of damage.

CenterPoint Energy appreciates the conversation started by the Minnesota Cable Communications Association and other stakeholders. We want to be a resource and participant in discussions on training time requirements and clarification on number of qualified installers on a site. We look forward to being a part of these ongoing conversations.

Sincerely,

/s/

Jamie Fitzke  
CenterPoint Energy  
Director of Government Affairs

/s/

Crystal Gorres  
CenterPoint Energy  
Damage Prevention Manager



# Minnesota Professional Fire Fighters

8100 Wayzata Blvd, St Louis Park, MN 55426

March 4, 2025

Chair Anderson, Lead Hansen, and Members of the House of the House Agriculture  
Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of Minnesota's 2,000 professional firefighters, I am writing to urge you to  
oppose weakening or repealing safety standards for broadband installation.

The Minnesota Professional Fire Fighters Association is proud to be the voice of  
Minnesota 2000 Professional Fire Fighters. We are committed to serving our members  
and making Minnesota safer to live, work, and raise a family. Every day, our members  
report for duty committed to providing excellence in public safety to the communities we  
serve.

The broadband worker and infrastructure safety provisions passed by the Legislature in  
2024 support the development of a skilled local workforce and hold broadband  
providers accountable for unsafe construction practices that jeopardize existing utility  
infrastructure and public and firefighter safety. Broadband installation-related line strikes  
can have devastating consequences. In 1998, a crew installing broadband cable for  
high-speed internet in downtown Saint Cloud struck a gas line. The resulting explosion  
killed four people, destroyed six buildings, and caused \$400,000 in damage. In 2018, a  
broadband installation-related line strike in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, led to the death of a  
volunteer firefighter. In 2023, broadband installation contractors severed the main and  
backup lines supporting Nebraska's 911 call system, leading to the loss of 911 access  
for 60 percent of Nebraska's residents for 12 hours.

Telecommunications installation is a leading cause of damage to underground utilities in  
Minnesota. When telecommunications installation operations hit underground  
infrastructure, including natural gas and electric lines, they threaten public safety –  
especially when the damage is not immediately reported. For example, the City of  
Bloomington recently reported that a fiber installer hit a gas line, patched it with duct  
tape, and reburied it – putting residents at risk.

With investment in broadband expected to grow significantly over the next five years, the Legislature is responsible for ensuring the safety of workers, infrastructure and first responders. Requiring contractors working near existing utilities to employ appropriately trained workers will make workers and communities safer, including Minnesota's firefighters. Delaying standards and cutting back on training hours will not.

We urge you to vote No on House File 47/Senate File 908.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

*Scott Vadnais*

Captain Scott Vadnais

President



March 4, 2025

Chair Anderson, Lead Hansen and Members of the House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of 300,000 union members who live and work in communities across Minnesota, we are writing to urge you to oppose weakening safety standards for broadband installation and ask you to vote No on House File 47.

The Broadband Worker Safety legislation passed by the Legislature in 2024 strengthened broadband worker and public safety by supporting the development of a skilled local workforce. A skilled, well-trained workforce will help to protect the integrity of existing public and utility infrastructure.

Reliable high-speed internet service is essential to the well-being of Minnesotans and access to education, health care, job opportunities, and other critical services. The State of Minnesota will soon receive and re-grant more than \$650 million in Federal funding to broadband providers, in addition to more than \$100 million in state funds, fueling well over \$1 billion in total investment in broadband infrastructure. We strongly support Minnesota's goal of providing universal high-speed internet connections to families and businesses in every corner of the state, but we need to do it right.

Many broadband installation workers are paid substandard wages, lack health and retirement benefits, and receive no formal training. Inexperience, lack of training and pressure to work quickly contribute to mistakes that jeopardize the safety of workers and members of the public along with the integrity of existing public utility infrastructure. Contractors that install broadband and other data lines are estimated to be responsible for hundreds of incidents of third-party damage to public and utility infrastructure annually.

Weakening safety standards for broadband installation will make Minnesota workers and communities less safe and risk public and utility infrastructure. Please vote No.

Sincerely,

Bernie Burnham  
President

Brad Lehto  
Secretary-Treasurer

175 Aurora Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55103

Phone: 651/227-7647  
Fax: 651/227-3801

Web Site: [www.mnafcio.org](http://www.mnafcio.org)



On behalf of the 70,000 skilled construction workers represented by the unions affiliated with the Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council, I am writing to share our strong opposition to weakening safety standards and accountability for broadband installation. House File 47 undermines the Broadband Worker Safety legislation passed by the Legislature in 2024 that establishes minimum qualifications for safety-sensitive positions and supports the development of skilled local workforce.

Unions affiliated with the Minnesota Building Trades represent men and women who build every part of Minnesota's transportation, water and energy infrastructure — from highways and bridges to underground electric and gas distribution lines. Our members use skills learned on the job and through best-in-class training and apprenticeship programs to build infrastructure that is safe and reliable. In return, our contractor partners pay family-supporting wages and benefits necessary for our members to pursue construction as a career, not just a job.

Minnesota Building Trades and our contractor partners are all too aware of the growing crisis in broadband installation. After all, it is union tradesmen and tradeswomen who build the underground gas, electric and other municipal infrastructure that is vulnerable to unsafe broadband installation practices, and who must repair the infrastructure after it has been damaged.

Minnesota maintains high standards in every other area of infrastructure construction — both for the quality of the work and the quality of the resulting jobs. Minnesota's public infrastructure is built with prevailing wage protections that provide a level playing field and encourage contractors to invest in a skilled workforce rather than participate in a race-to-the-bottom. Meanwhile, Minnesota's private energy infrastructure is closely regulated, and both investor-owned and cooperative utilities have similar incentives to invest in high-quality workforce and work.

Unfortunately, the cable and broadband industry is the exception. Broadband providers resist being held to basic standards that apply to other types of critical infrastructure. While contractors who install gas and water lines are required to meet minimum workforce qualifications, an industry whose contractors operate drills around — and sometimes straight through those lines — rejects proposed minimum qualifications designed to prevent a catastrophic incident.

There is no reason we should not keep our increasingly vital broadband infrastructure on a similar path by maintaining minimum training standards, holding broadband providers accountable for their contracting practices, and incentivizing best practices.

It is time for Minnesota to treat broadband as critical infrastructure, not only by investing in deployment of fiber to every home and business in the state, but also by holding the industry accountable to the same standards as other infrastructure operators and recipients of public funds. We urge you to oppose House File 47 which will make Minnesota workers and communities less safe and risk public and utility infrastructure.

Thank you,

Tom Dicklich, Executive Director