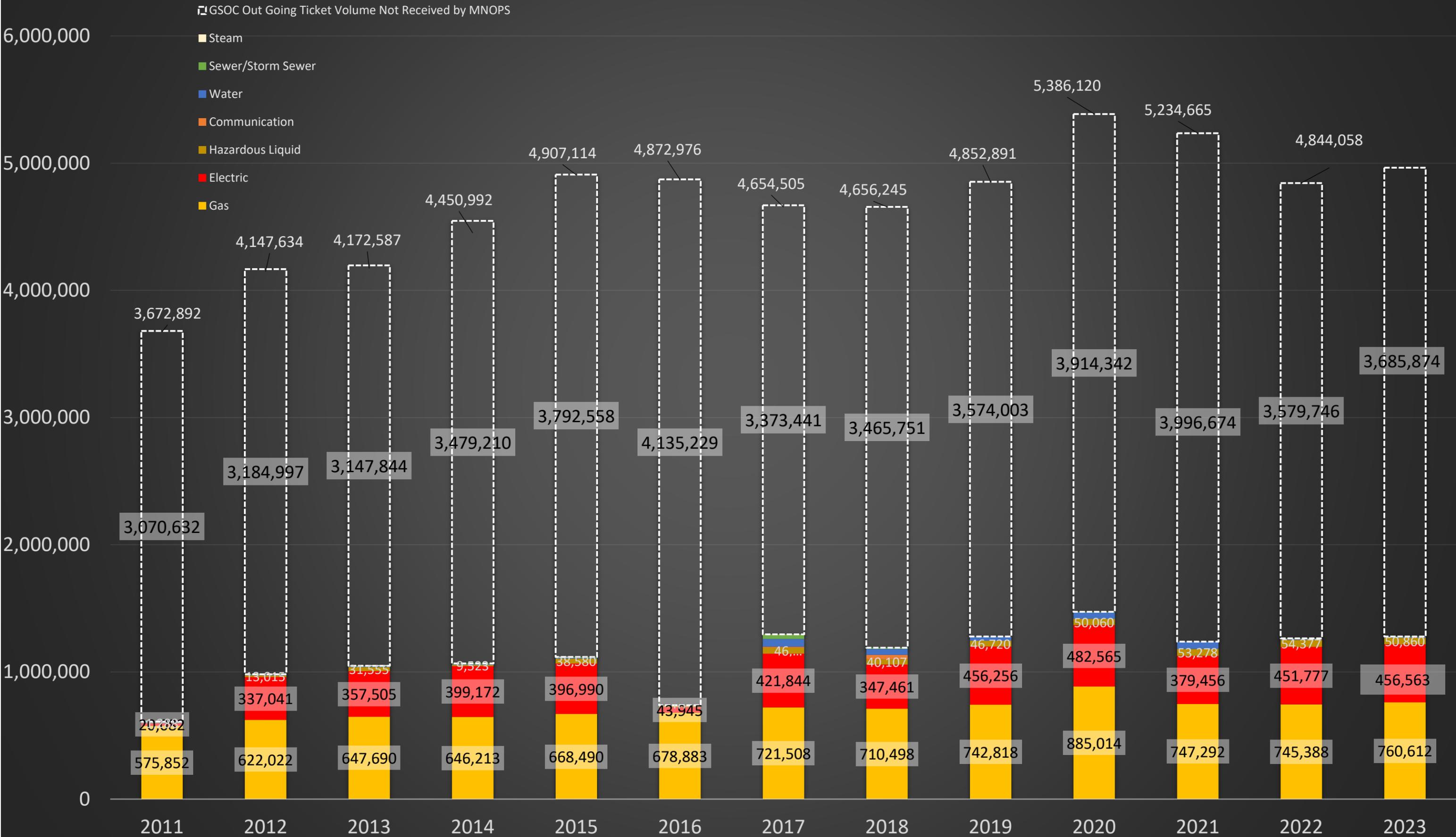
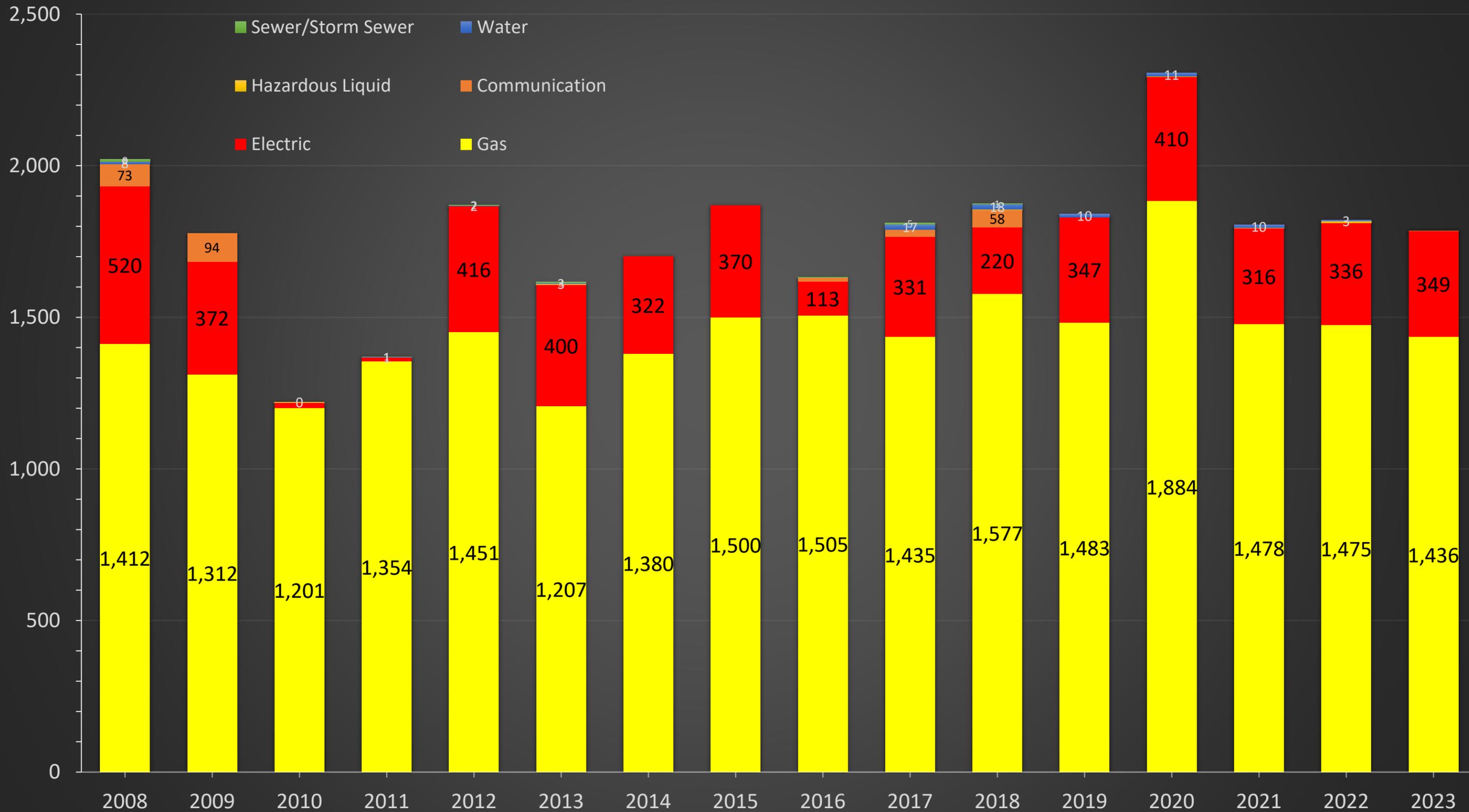


Letters  
and  
Testimony for  
HF 4626

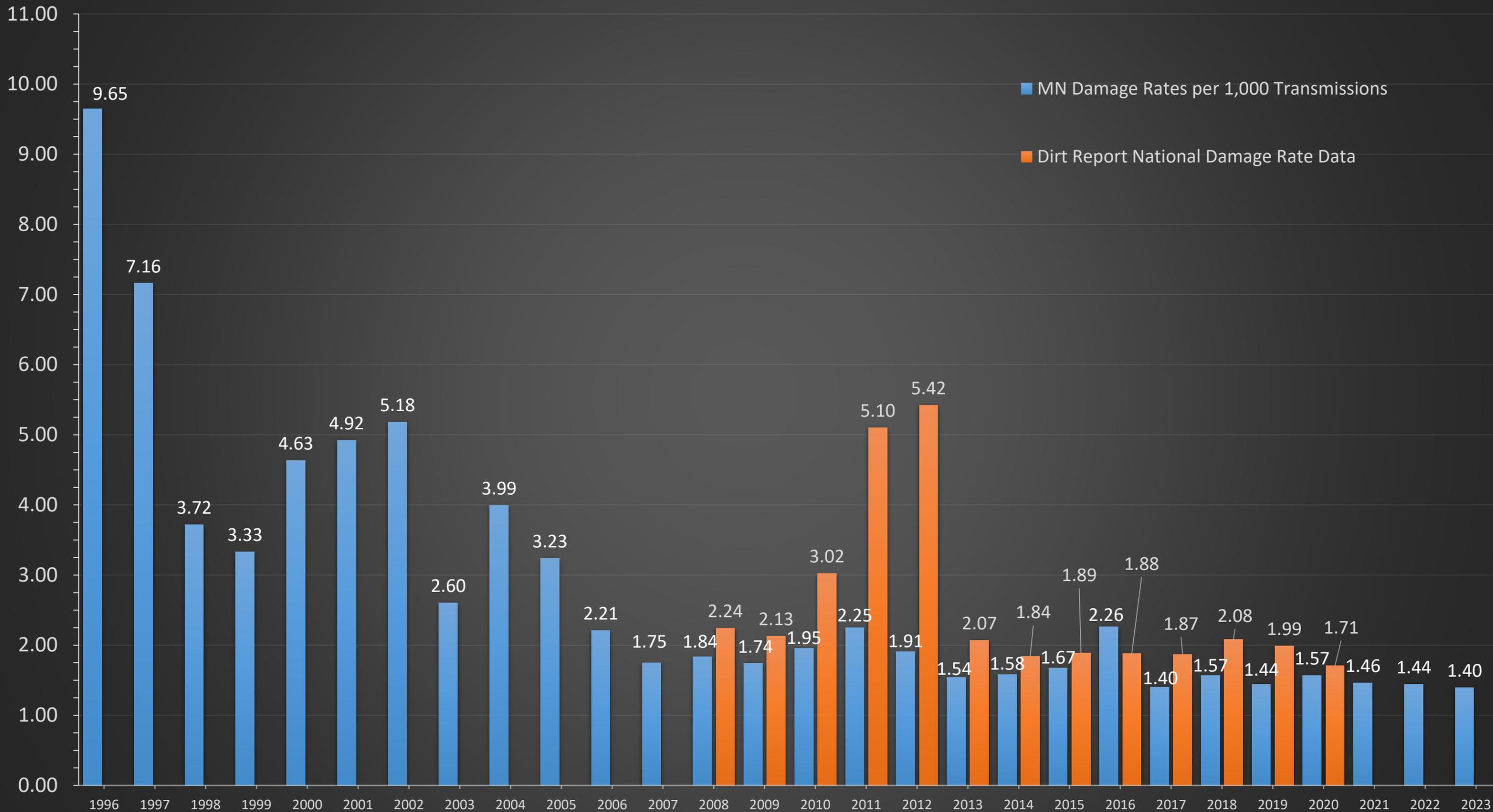
# Out Going Transmission Volume Received by MNOPS



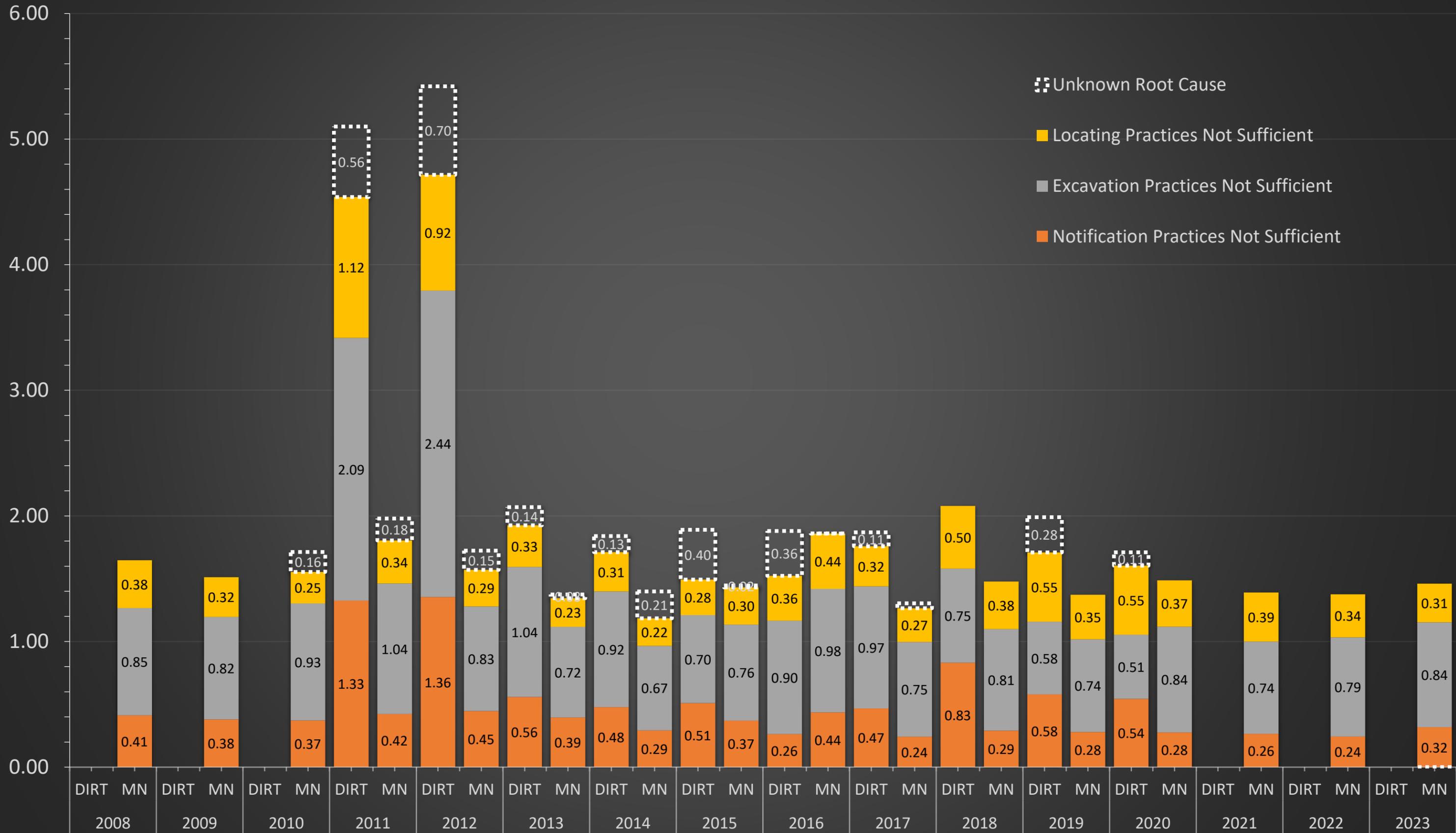
# Damages Submitted to MNOPS by Utility Type



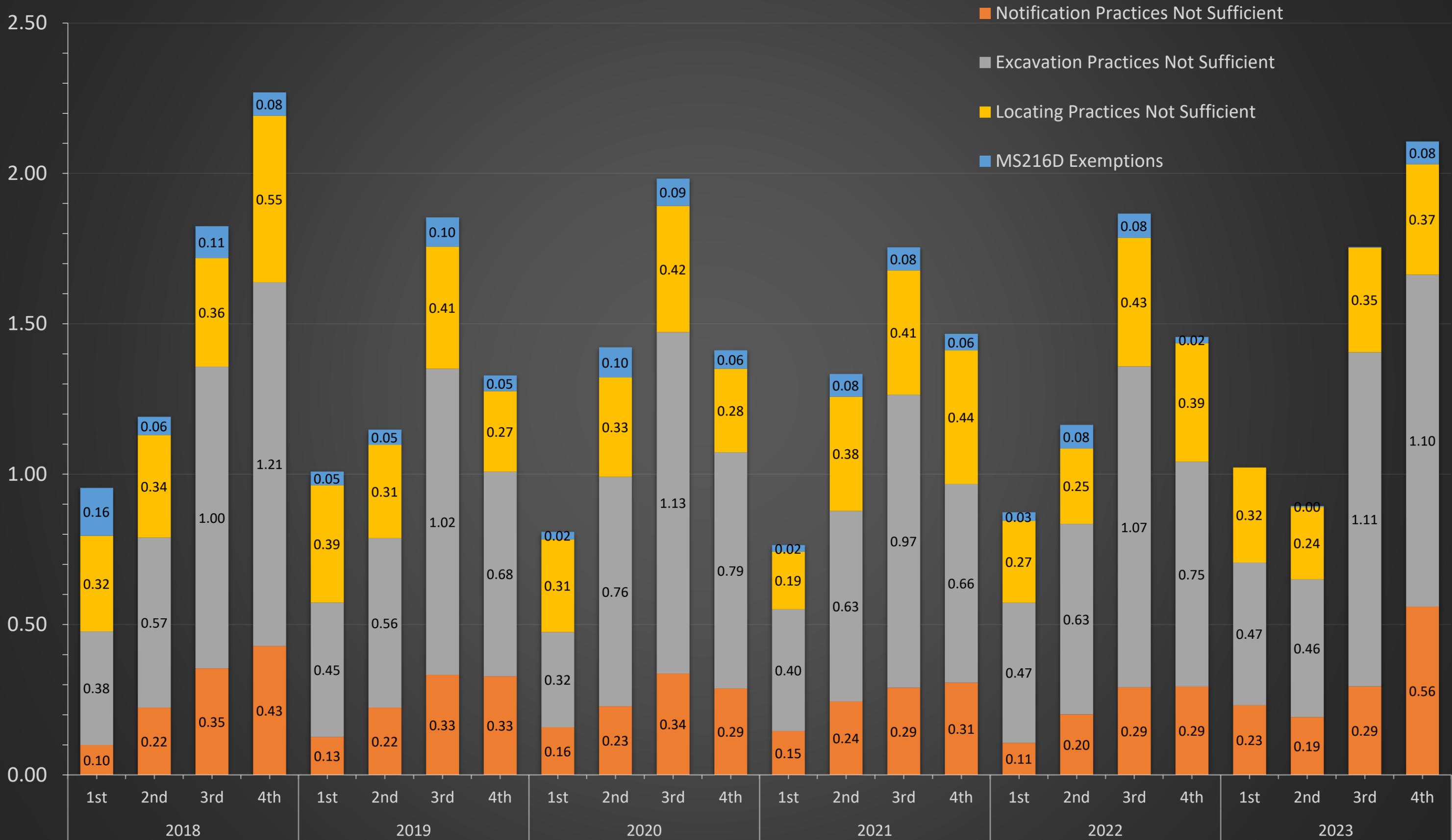
# All Utility Damages - Per 1,000 Locates - MN vs DIRT



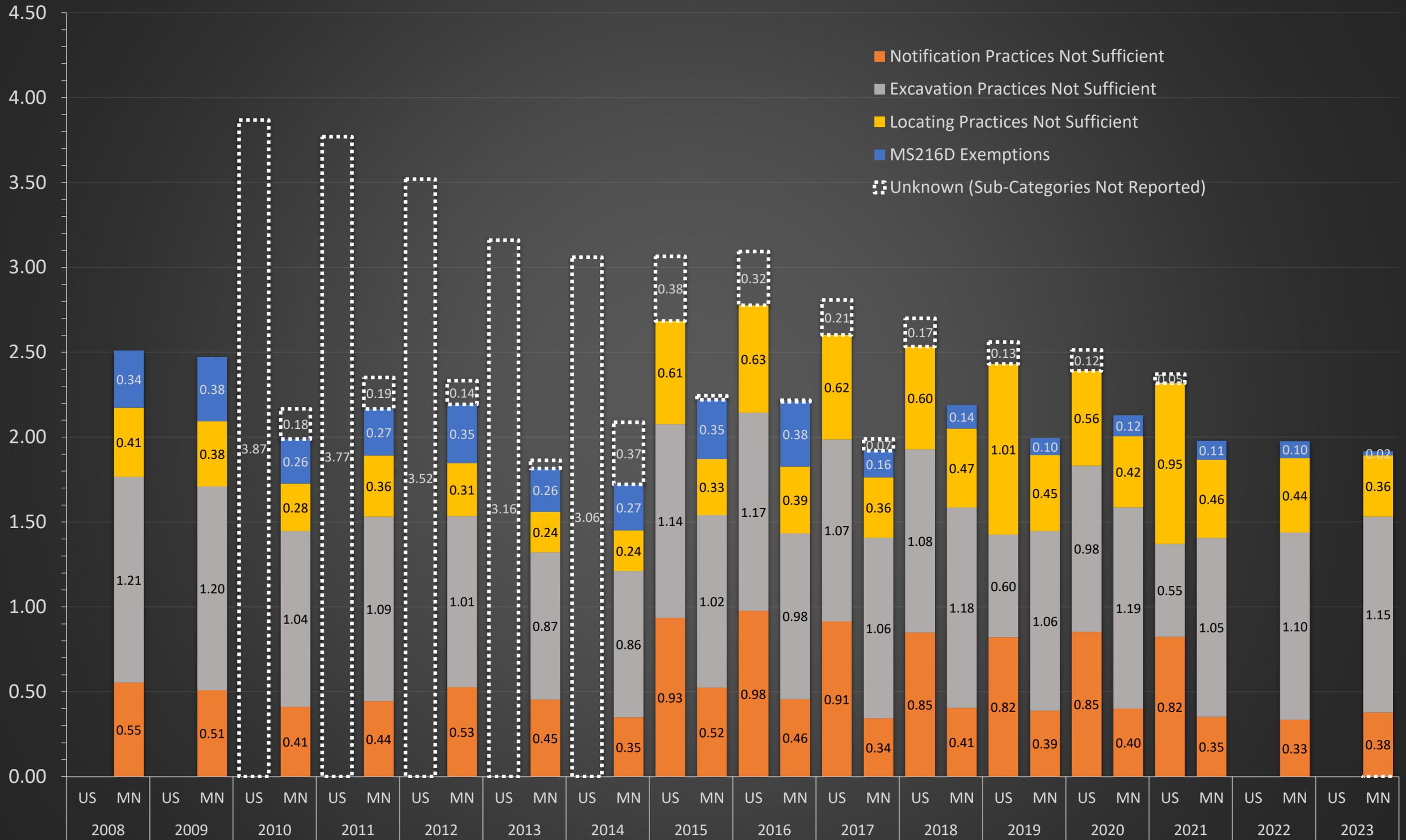
# All Utilities - Damages per 1,000 Locates - MN vs DIRT



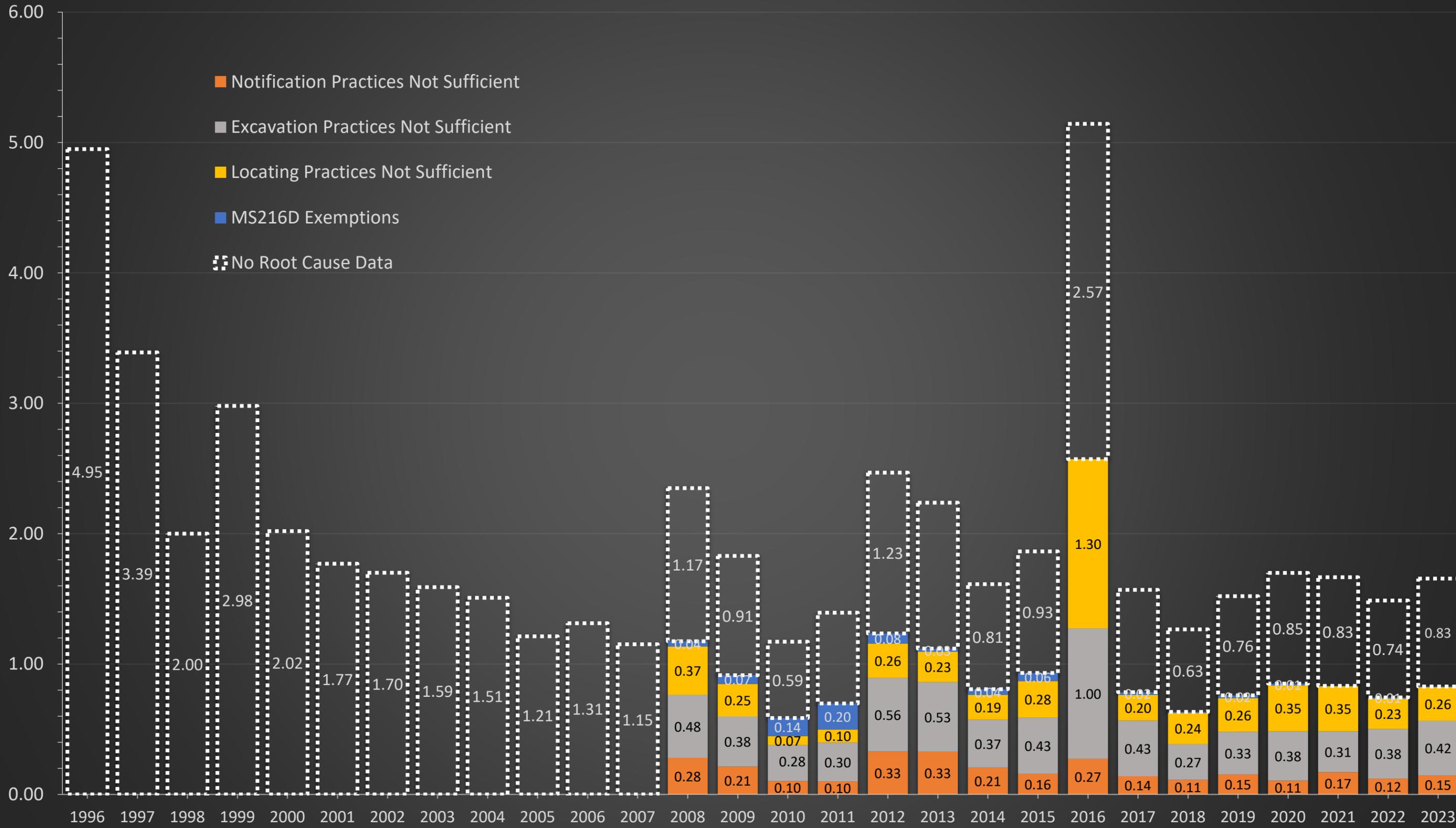
# All Utilities - Damages per 1,000 Locates - MN Quarterly



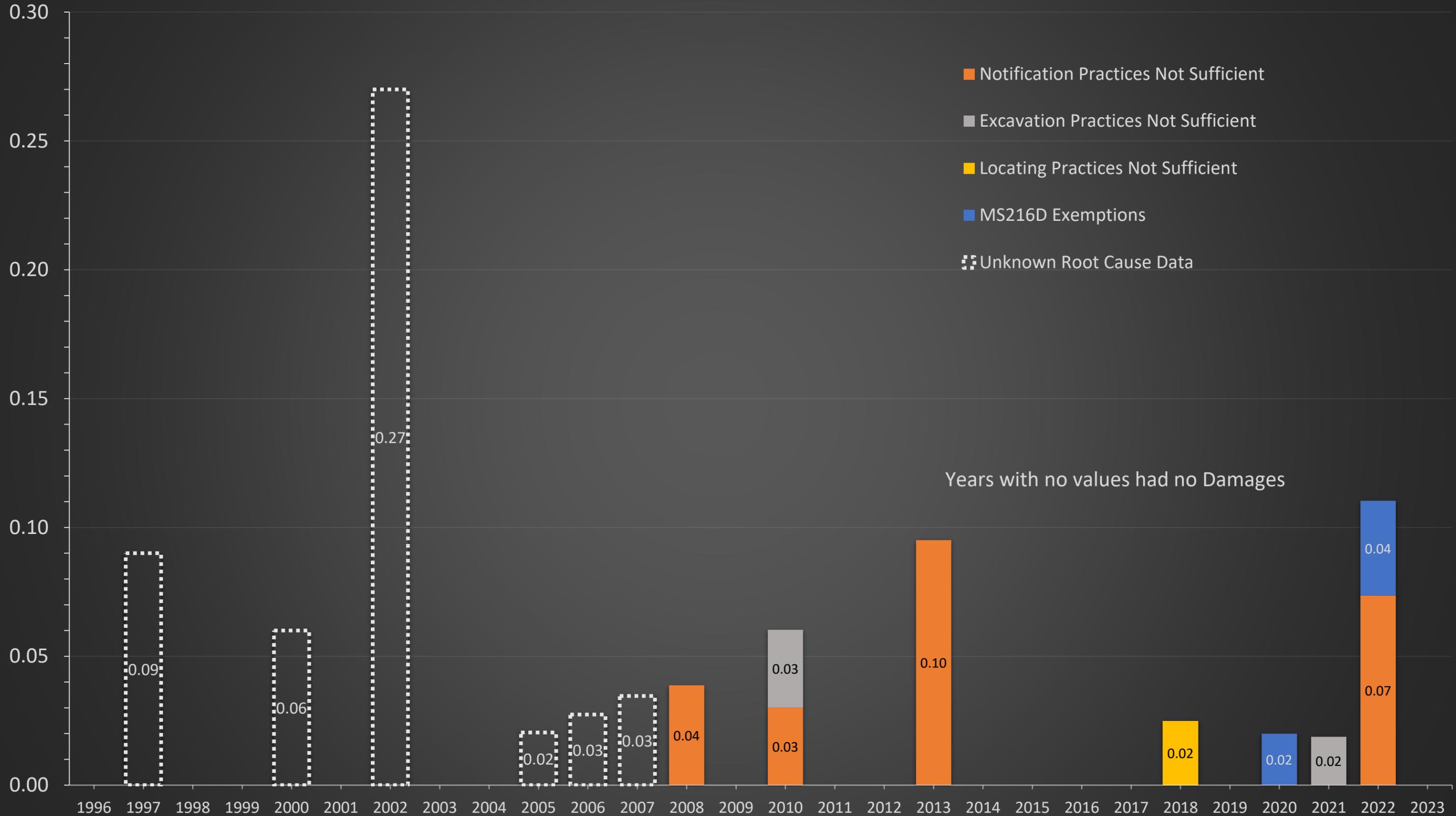
# Gas - Damages Per 1,000 Locates - US vs MN



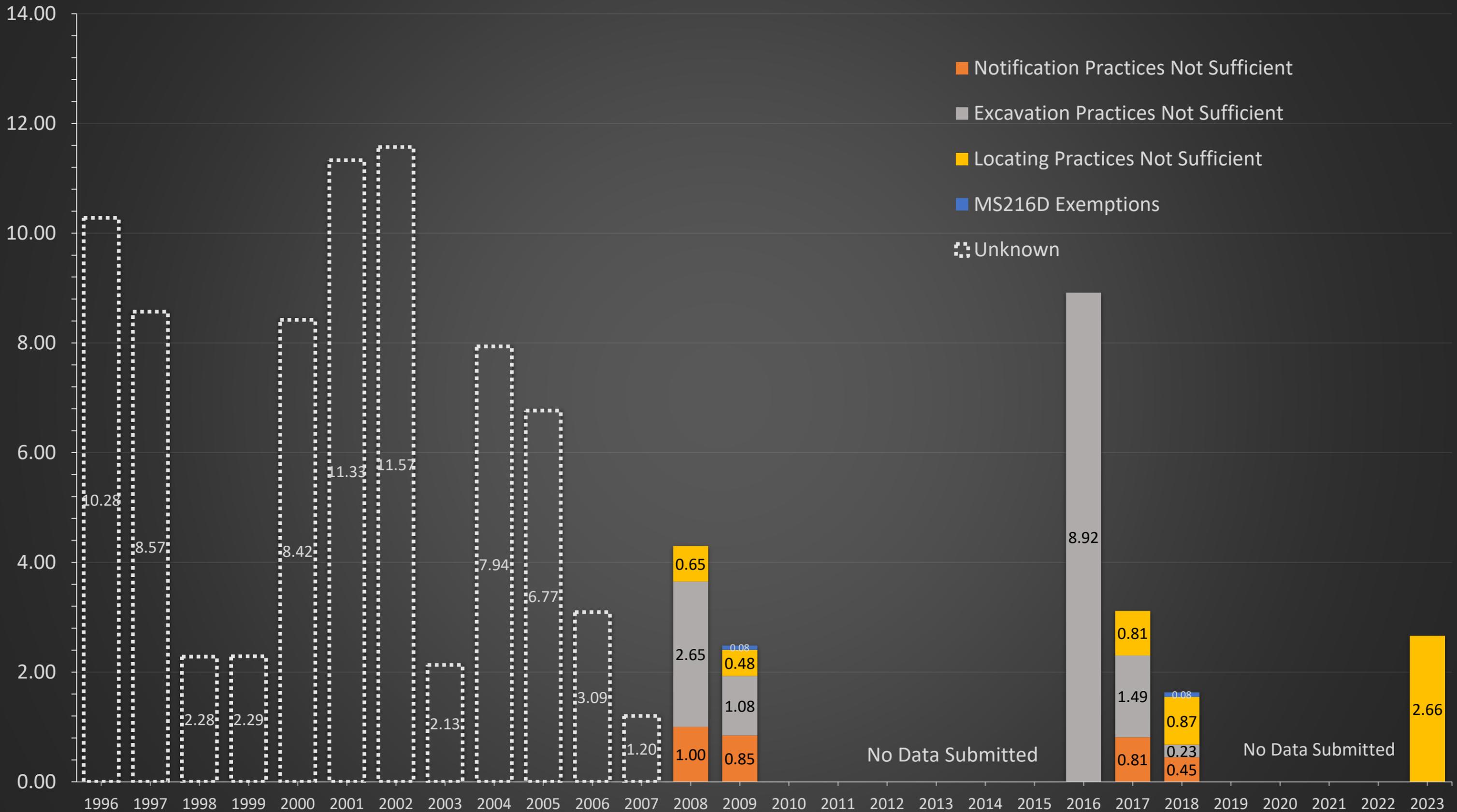
# Electric - Damages Per 1,000 Locates - MN



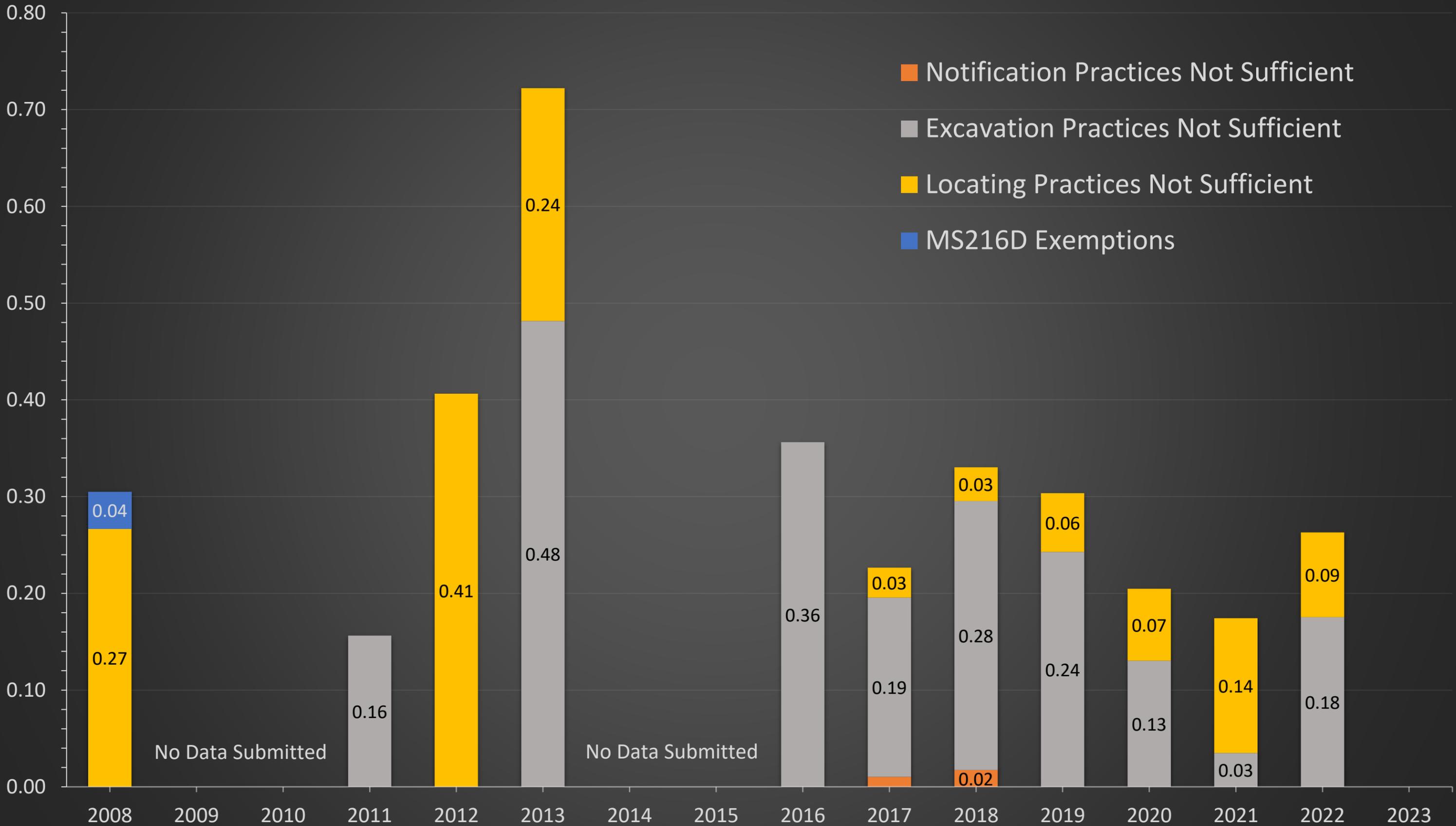
# Hazardous Liquid - Damages Per 1,000 Locates - MN



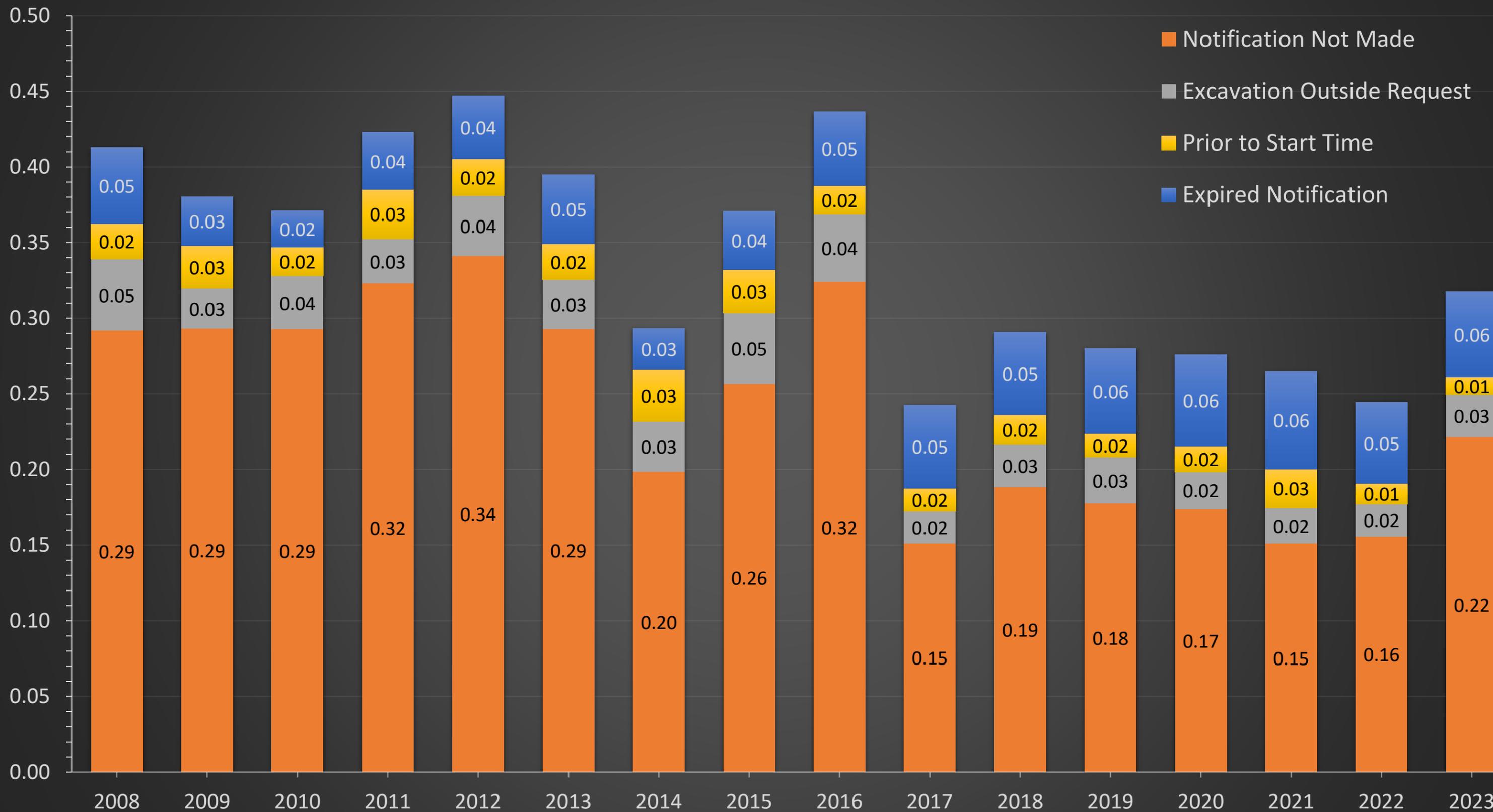
# Communication - Damages Per 1,000 Locates - MN



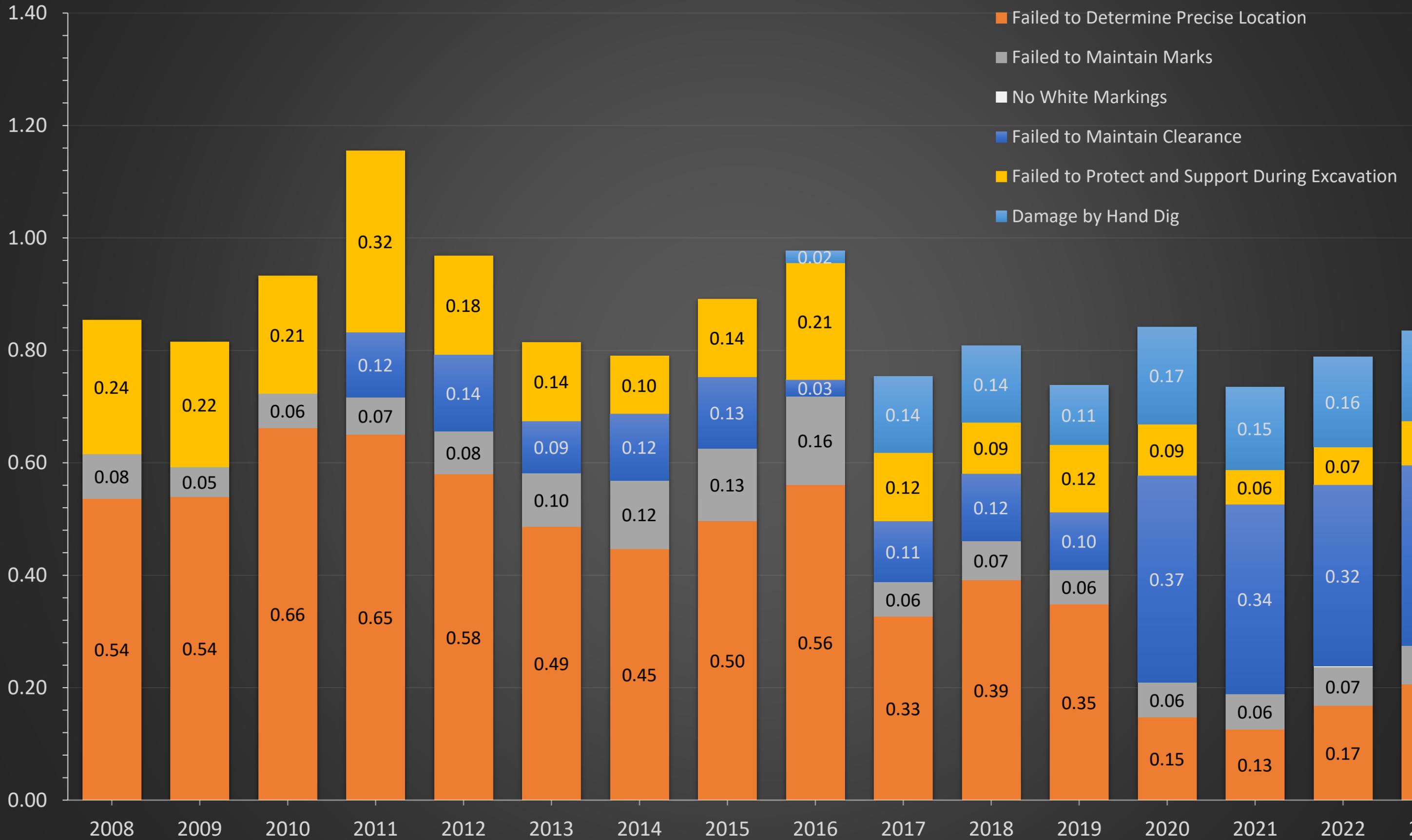
# Water & Sewer - Damages Per 1,000 Locates - MN



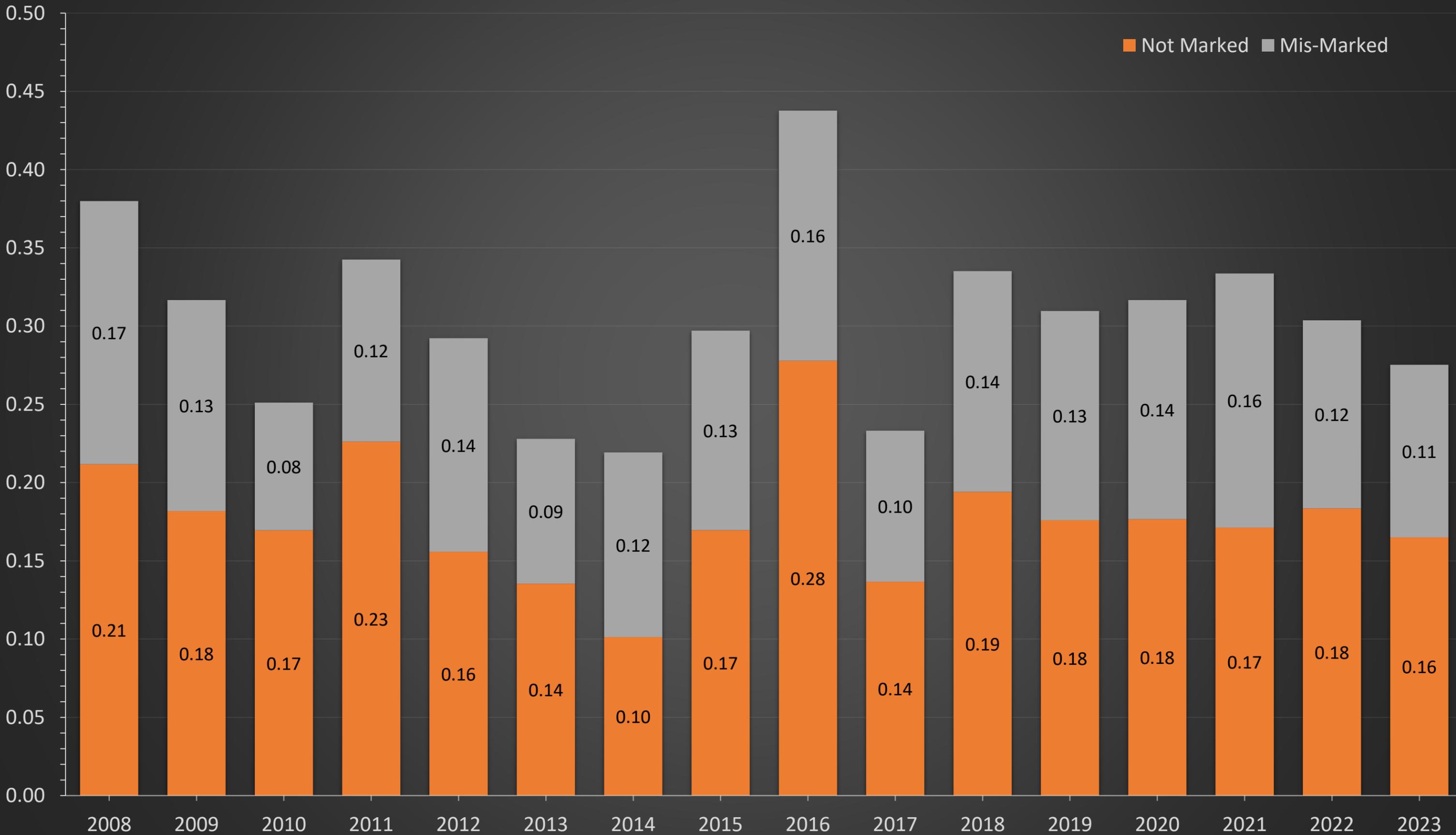
# All Utilities Notification Practices NS - Damages per 1,000 Locates - MN



# All Utilities Excavation Practices NS - Damages per 1,000 Locates - MN



# All Utilities Locating Practices NS - Damages per 1,000 Locates - MN





Community Voices

## Broadband access is critical — and so is installing it responsibly

*Safety should be paramount as Minnesota is poised for major investment in high-speed internet access.*

by **Jason George**  
02/12/2024



An employee of Silica Broadband installing fiber optic cable for internet use in rural Kentucky. Credit: REUTERS/Amira Karaoud

In today’s hyper-connected economy, access to high-speed internet can transform a community. Lack of access can smother its future.

So the stakes are high as Minnesota is poised to invest more than \$650 million in federal funding for broadband, thanks to the bipartisan infrastructure bill championed by President Joe Biden.

But the stakes are also high when inexperienced, underpaid workers install fiber optics cables, often digging within inches of dangerous gas utilities or powerlines. One careless error could be fatal to workers and catastrophic to a community.

You'd think an industry working in proximity to such vital, yet hazardous, infrastructure would be tightly regulated, with specific safety and training requirements enforced.

Unfortunately, you'd be wrong.

Unlike the utility sector, there are minimal regulations and safety standards in the broadband industry, and what few exist aren't properly enforced, judging from conversations with contractors and workers.

That's why I've been watching with alarm as more and more work in the broadband industry goes to fly-by-night contractors that bring in out-of-state workers who don't have the proper training to do this work safely.

Here's an example: Gas companies routinely bring in hydro excavation trucks to safely expose existing pipelines before digging nearby. If you can see the pipes, you're much less likely to strike one. But irresponsible broadband installers often skip this step — they just bring in a backhoe with an inexperienced operator and hope they don't nick a gas line.

Workers using heavy equipment to install broadband near utilities should have the same qualifications as those doing gas pipeline and other utility maintenance work.

Another problem is fair wages. Despite broadband projects receiving significant state subsidies, non-union workers haven't been receiving the pay and benefits they deserve. That leads to high turnover and even less jobsite experience, creating greater risk.

As leader of the largest construction union in the state, I know Minnesota has well-trained operators who can perform this work safely.

They work for more than a dozen contractors that provide family-sustaining jobs in your communities. They benefit from our gold-standard apprenticeship program and a top-tier national training center. And they learn how to operate heavy equipment safely in utility corridors and other situations.

These responsible companies that employ skilled local workers at union wages and benefits must compete with cutthroat, out-of-state contractors that undercut our local standards at the expense of workers and the safety of communities.

With significant new federal resources to support broadband deployment, now is the time for the state to ensure public money goes to responsible contractors that pay workers fairly and prioritize safety.

It's also time to establish basic safety and training requirements — similar to those found in other industries — to protect workers and communities. Commonsense measures, like drug and alcohol testing and minimum training standards, will benefit everyone.



Jason George

We'll be working with legislators this session on ways to improve the situation, because this issue touches every corner of our state. We share the goal of ensuring all Minnesotans have access to reliable broadband service. And that can only be accomplished safely by using well-trained, fairly paid workers.

*Jason George is the business manager of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49, which represents nearly 15,000 heavy equipment operators, mechanics and stationary engineers across Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.*



April 2, 2024

**Re: HF 4659/HF 4626**

Dear House Labor and Industry Finance and Policy Chair, Rep. Michael Nelson and Committee Members:

The Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) has been a leading advocate of our state's Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Program for more than a decade. We have asked this Legislature on many occasions to fund the grant program and you have graciously obliged because you believe, as we do, that this is one of the most consequential investments the state can make.

Broadband infrastructure grant programs are based on the premise that the remaining unserved homes and businesses would never receive broadband service because the cost to connect them is too high for an ISP build the project on its own. Our grant program has had a prevailing wage exemption in statute for nearly 10 years. The reason for this is to lower project costs and make them financially viable. Our grant program has been used by states across the country and even some federal programs. It is the gold standard, often referred to as the Minnesota Model.

**HF 4659** would apply prevailing wage to the \$650 million in federal BEAD funding coming to Minnesota over the next few years. **HF 4626** would repeal the existing prevailing wage exemption for broadband projects in the Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Program. **AMC opposes these bills for a several reasons.**

First, Minnesota's portion of the BEAD funding is finite. As part of the agreement with the NTIA and U.S. Department of Commerce, Minnesota is obligated to serve every home and business with high-speed broadband using these dollars. Prevailing wage will drive up project costs, especially in the hardest to serve areas in rural counties. If prevailing wage standards were required, we are not sure how the state could possibly meet its 100% connectivity obligation without additional funds, which the federal government will not supply.

Second, counties regularly contribute thousands of dollars to these projects in partnership with ISPs. We have heard directly from large and small ISPs and rural cooperatives that they will not participate in these voluntary grant programs if prevailing wage standards are required. In many counties in rural Minnesota, there is only one ISP. If they do not apply for these grants, no one will, and our residents will be left behind as they have been for the last quarter century.

Lastly, HF 4659 would award additional points on a grant application if an ISP conforms to prevailing wage standards. AMC believes this would put Minnesota out of compliance with federal program guidelines and result in funds being further delayed or, worse, withheld by NTIA and the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on the bills with you today.

Sincerely,

Nathan Zacharias, Technology Policy Analyst  
*Association of Minnesota Counties*