

## State News for NSPE Members

### NorthWestern Energy Reaches Agreement in Montana Regulatory Rate Review

NorthWestern Corporation (d/b/a NorthWestern Energy) and certain parties reached a settlement agreement in its Montana electric and natural gas regulatory rate review that has been submitted to the Montana Public Service Commission for its consideration. In addition to NorthWestern, settling parties include the Montana Consumer Counsel, the Montana Large Customer Group, the Federal Executive Agencies, and Walmart Inc, [Yahoo!Finance reports](#).

The settlement includes, among other things, agreement on electric and natural gas base revenue increases, allocated cost of service, rate design, updates to the base amount of revenues associated with property taxes and electric supply costs, and regulatory policy issues related to requested changes in regulatory mechanisms.

If approved, the settlement agreement is designed to increase annual electric base revenues by approximately \$67.4 million, and increase annual natural gas base revenues by approximately \$14.1 million.

The settlement is based on an authorized return on equity of 9.65% for electric operations and 9.55% for natural gas operations, which are consistent with current authorized ROEs, and a 48% equity component of the capital structure. [Read more](#).

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### MSU Seeks to Improve Chemical Engineering Education With \$400,000 Grant

Backed by a new \$400,000 grant from the National Science Foundation, Montana State University is seeking to improve chemical engineering education within a core set of university classes and beyond, the [school recently announced](#).

Stephanie Wettstein and Jennifer Brown, associate professors in the Department

of Chemical and Biological Engineering in MSU's Norm Asbjornson College of Engineering, are leading the project to explore how chemical engineering laboratory classes can support the kind of independent problem-solving and communication skills that empower graduates in the workforce. MSU will receive \$177,000 of the funding through NSF's Research in the Formation of Engineers program, with the remainder going to project partners at the University of New Mexico.

The project emerged from Brown and Wettstein's experience teaching two senior-level chemical engineering laboratory classes. As is common at universities across the country, the labs have been largely unchanged for decades and are based on conducting prescribed, "recipe-like" experiments and drafting long reports to describe the results, they said. Wettstein, who worked as a process engineer in the paper products industry for several years before coming to MSU to teach in 2012, noticed how that experience for students contrasted with how professional engineers navigate challenges dynamically and often must communicate in concise memos. [Read more.](#)

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## **Montana Tech Students on a Quest for 'Green Concrete'**

Five seniors at Montana Technological University have focused a Senior Design Project on testing waste materials that could be used to make a more environmentally friendly concrete, [The Montana Standard reports](#).

The interdisciplinary team included civil engineering students Colton Grange of Philipsburg, Connor Johnson of Whitehall, and Gabriel Sims of Billings. In addition, environmental engineering students Nevada Strandberg of Helena and Shyla Wesely of Glasgow brought expertise from their discipline.

The students tested the performance of concrete with waste products in the mix instead of a full complement of cement in a quest for "green concrete."

They tested a few different waste products: tailings from Montana Resources' Yankee Doodle Tailings Pond, slag from the former smelter in Anaconda, sludge from the wastewater treatment plant and biochar (black carbon produced from biomass sources such as wood chips, manure and other agricultural waste products).

In the end, the concrete mix with tailings replacing a percentage of cement consistently demonstrated the greatest strength, the students said. According to numerous sources, including industry associations, the production of cement and concrete yields a substantial carbon footprint. [Read more.](#)

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## Don't Hesitate to Share Your PE Story

*By Britt Smith, P.E., F.NSPE, President 2022–2023*



Have you ever thought about how many people will ever need to hire an engineer? Probably not very many. But as engineers, we have a huge impact on their lives and in countless ways. For example, we all expect clean water to come out of the faucet, the lights to come on when we want, the bridge we cross on the way to work to be safe, the air we breathe to be clean, and the products we buy for our kids to be safe. When engineers do their best work, most people don't even notice. Yet, as a profession we strive to make everyone's life better.

The work of our profession by design affects the lives of many people—likely tens of thousands on a daily basis. In my case, I work in the public works department in the community that I reside and that means the decisions I make don't just affect nameless strangers. The people in this community are my neighbors, my friends, and my family. [Read more.](#)

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## New Policy Documents: The Signature and Stamp, Key Issues for the PE

The Committee on Policy and Advocacy has released the “[What a PE Says with their Signature and Stamp](#)” document. The document provides a general awareness of the PE signature and stamp process and includes best practices and lessons learned for those considering developing or improving their own process. The committee recently updated and released the documents, “[What is a PE?](#)” and “[Key Issues for the Professional Engineer.](#)” Updated position statements can be accessed [here](#).



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## QBS Awards Program Accepting Nominations

NSPE is seeking nominations for the 2023 QBS Awards. The [QBS Awards program](#) promotes and recognizes the exemplary use of the qualifications-based selection process.

Award winners [serve as examples of how well the QBS process works](#), and they help NSPE promote the practice of QBS in jurisdictions that do not use, or underuse, QBS to procure engineering services. A maximum of one QBS Award may be presented to the federal government sector, the state government sector (includes all governmental units under the state level), and nongovernment sector.

The deadline for nominations is **Monday, May 1** (close of business). Access the awards information and nomination form [here](#).

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