

# INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS

LOCAL NO. 49, 49A, 49B, 49C, 49D, 49E, 49L  
MINNESOTA • NORTH DAKOTA • SOUTH DAKOTA

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**To:** Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MN PUC)  
**From:** Nathaniel Runke- Regulatory & Political Affairs Coordinator, Int'l Union of Operating Engineers, Local 49  
**Date:** September 13, 2021  
**RE:** Docket Number. **E-002/GS-21-191, E-002/TL-21-189, E-002/TL-21-190**

**In the Matter of the Application of Xcel Energy for a Site Permit and Two Route Permits for the up to 460 Megawatt Sherco Solar Energy Generating System and Associated 345 Kilovolt Transmission Lines in Sherburne County, Minnesota**

On behalf of the over 14,000 heavy equipment operating engineers represented by the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 49 ("Local 49") across Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota, I am thankful for the opportunity to comment in support of Xcel Energy's proposed up to 460-megawatt solar project and two 345 kilovolt transmission lines (Sherco Solar project).

Many of our members have concerns about the loss of legacy energy generation facilities along with the job opportunities they represent. These concerns were heightened in the recent past because many renewable energy projects elected to use out-of-state contractors and labor for the construction of their projects. Xcel Energy's efforts to utilize local union labor for construction of its renewable energy projects and its longstanding tradition of using local contractors and union labor has shown our membership that the loss of legacy energy facilities does not mean their host communities and workforce will not play a crucial role in our energy future.

Along with these local equity considerations Xcel Energy also describes how they are cultivating a diverse and inclusive workforce through this project. Their commitment to utilizing local union labor to staff and maintain their facilities aids in furthering this mission. Local 49 and our signatory contractors strive to diversify and grow our membership across Minnesota through our Operating Engineer Pathway in the OE High School Pathway Program. This is a 4-course virtual high school curriculum that works to create opportunity for all Minnesota high school students to learn about a career as an Operating Engineer. Local 49 also co-administers the Building Strong Communities (BSC) Program, a multi-trade apprenticeship preparatory program. Over 80% of BSC program participants are women and/or from BIPOC communities and 42% of the participants in the current 2021 cohort are female. Women Building Success, of which our Local 49 Women's group is a partner, financially sponsors females through the Building Strong

Communities program. Finally, we work in partnership with Five Skies Training Program and the Indigenous Communities to build pathways to careers in our industry. Through Xcel Energy's internal efforts and its use of union labor, for the Sherco Solar project, the pathway to careers in the energy sector will become more inclusive and equitable.

These local and diverse job opportunities are one reason that utility-scale solar and wind projects built and owned by utilities must be a major component of Minnesota's renewable energy future. The oversight provided, opportunity for community involvement, and emphasis on the need for projects to benefit their communities allow these projects to maximize their value to Minnesota and its residents. They ensure that energy transition efforts incorporate employment opportunity, affordable and sustainable energy supply, and a cleaner environment for all Minnesotans.

The Sherco Solar project will provide numerous positive human impacts. It will create nearly 900 job opportunities for Minnesota's highly skilled energy infrastructure construction workforce. These jobs will provide family sustaining wages and benefits, and all parties involved are committed to ensure that the workforce for this project is diverse and equitable. Finally, the use of local union labor will keep more of the project's monetary benefits within the local economy and Minnesota tax base.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Nathaniel J Runke  
Regulatory & Political Affairs Coordinator  
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