

# The Midwest Wireman

BY ELECTRICIANS, FOR ELECTRICIANS

Vol. 13, Iss. 4

Winter 2006

*Special points of Interest:*

- Safety Tips & TimeSavers
- Code Updates
- Growing Labor Shortages?
- <http://www.ibew22.org>

"It's so simple to be wise. Just think of something stupid to say and then don't say it."

- Sam Levenson  
American Humorist

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## Nebraska Supreme Court Rules on Vacation Policy

In a unanimous decision, that was long over due, the Nebraska State Supreme Court held that workers leaving a job must receive a final check for vacation time accrued, but not used, no matter what policy an employer adopts.

You may have missed an article that appeared in the Omaha World Herald October 20, 2006 where in the Nebraska State Supreme Court ruled on a case between a company and four former employees who resigned separately over the course of Summer 1998. Each had quit voluntarily.

In 2000, each of the former employees sent a letter to the company asking that they be paid for their vacation days. The company refused their requests sight-seeing the company handbook, which stated, "Upon termination, employees will not be paid for unused vacation time."

Before the court, the company attorney argued that vacation is a fringe benefit available only to employees who meet certain conditions and that they had to be working for the company to take advantage of the benefit. The attorney for the former employees pointed out the company policy stated in the handbook was a violation of state law. Nebraska state law defines fringe benefits, including vacation time, as wages and requires a company to pay wages due to former employees.

The Court, in its decision, found the company's acts a violation of state law which voids the employee agreement. The Court said, "We hold that accrued vacation time, which is part of an employment agreement, is due and payable as wages upon termination of employment."

So the next time you want to change employers, but base your decision on whether you will lose earned vacation time, just remind your former employer the law is on your side.

You can view the entire Nebraska Wage Payment and Collection Act at:  
<http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/epubs/L1500/Q024-2005.pdf>

*UNITED WE BARGAIN, DIVIDED WE BEG*

## Nightmare Installations

### Sparking and Arcing

My neighbor came over and told me the receptacle serving the washing machine in his house was sparking when he touched it, but he didn't get shocked. I went to check this out.

The Romex coming down the block wall to the washer receptacle was sleeved with EMT. I discovered that when I pushed the EMT away from the metal dryer vent, there was indeed an arc. When I opened the panel, I found out why.

It seems a previous owner had added some wiring and didn't want to make the effort of landing the wires on the crowded neutral bar. An added ground bar got the neutrals, which worked until the dampness of the basement corroded the screws. Then the current found a better path through the washer conduit, dryer vent, water pipe, and grounding electrode conductor. When I broke this path it caused an arc. I assumed they didn't get shocked because the corroded screws were still a better path to ground than they were.

I rearranged their panel wiring while thinking, "This is why you should hire a professional in the first place!"

*K. Keimy*

Send us your stories and we'll publish them. They maybe edited for spelling and form, but we can all learn from other's experiences. Send your stories to 8946 L Street Omaha, NE 68127 attention The Midwest Wireman.  
22@ibew22.org

## Factoids and FunnStuff

Towering more than a mile above the Wyoming valley known as Jackson Hole, the awe-inspiring Grand Teton rises to 13,770 feet above sea level. Located south of Yellowstone National Park, twelve Teton peaks reach higher than 12,000 feet elevation, high enough to support a dozen mountain glaciers. Youngest of the mountains in the Rocky Mountain system, the Teton Range displays some of the North America's oldest rocks. About 4,100,000 people visit Grand Teton National Park every year.

The first plastic ever invented was celluloid. It came about as an alternative for billiard balls made from ivory.

The Amazon river pushes so much water into the Atlantic that, more than a hundred miles at sea, off the mouth of the river, one can dip fresh water out of the ocean and drink it.

The oldest letter of the alphabet is the letter "O."

A gaffer is the chief electrician on a film set.

**Remember, They Can't Do It Without You!**

## THE MYTHICAL TWO WEEK NOTICE

"You have to give a two week notice if your going to quit." We have all been told that. Have you ever asked yourself where that's written? We've been made to believe it's the law. Would you be shocked to know that it isn't. Oh, it may be in the "Employee Handbook," but there is no legal requirement to give notice. Not only that, if you read that same "Employee Handbook," you'll generally find some kind of disclaimer stating that "...nothing in this book is to be considered a contractual agreement between the employer and employee and as such can be changed by the employer at any time without the employee's consent..." That means your employer can not legally be bound by the policies or procedures found in the "Handbook" and neither are you, it's a wish list.

We were all raised with a sense of common courtesy, but for some reason it doesn't seem to apply to some employers. Many times when an employee who gives his "two weeks notice," their told hit he road. The same employer would be upset if you just up and quit. Ask yourself how often does an employer give two weeks notice when he is letting you go.

All you can do is try to not burn any bridges, but any employer who would hold it against you for trying to improve yourself or your family's condition, isn't someone your probably to concerned about working for again anyway. We hope this gives you something to think about.

## Trade Tricks

### **Shorten a conduit without damaging wires inside... from T. Hicks**

When you have a conduit that stubs up thru a slab and the wires have already been pulled, but the pipe needs to be trimmed to length. Simply slide a smaller piece of conduit over the conductors, making sure it's small enough to fit inside the other pipe. Push it down past where you are going to make your cut. This "inner pipe" will serve as a guard against nicking as you work your way around the conduit with your saw.

### **Locating Walls From Basement in Old Houses... from M. Thomasello**

Get a length of coat hanger wire about 8 inches long being sure it is straight, cut it at a slant to get a sharp point. put it into a 3/8 drill and use it as a drill bit. When trying to find an exact location to drill up from the basement to the floor above, simply use the coat hanger to drill a very discrete hole close to the baseboard, in this way you are sure to be in the right bay when you drill up with your wood bit. The small hole that you made with the coat hanger can be filled with wood putty. I did not believe this would work so I tested it on a 1 inch piece of oak, it works great.



## 2005 Code Q&A...By Steven Owen This section was reorganized with editorial changes to add clarity and uniform interpretation. (Note: Code text has been paraphrased.)

**Q.** The installation of fire alarm circuits (Art. 760), communication circuits (Art. 800), CATV and radio distribution systems (Art. 820), and network powered broadband communication systems (Art. 830) installed in the hollow space above a suspended ceiling *does not require* secure support independent of the existing wires used to support the ceiling for which of the following?

- A)** fire alarm systems
- B)** communication systems
- C)** community antenna television systems / radio distribution systems
- D)** network powered broadband communication systems (voice and data)
- E)** None of the above

**Answer: E**

**Explanation:** Sections 800.24, 820.24, and 830.24 of the 2005 NEC were revised to add an additional requirement for secure support, per 300.11. However, Section 760.8 was not revised to add the additional requirement for secure support per 300.11. Remember, it's important to provide proper support and secure all wiring installations.

**Q.** An equipotential plane installed at a catfish farm pond is required for the service equipment installed outdoors (adjacent to the pond), where the service equipment controls equipment is installed in and adjacent to the water. This equipotential plane shall consist of a minimum size \_\_\_\_\_ copper conductor, installed \_\_\_\_\_, and extended out a distance of at least \_\_\_\_\_ in all directions from the equipment.

- A)** No. 8 solid / a minimum of 3 inches beneath or embedded in the walk surface / 36 inches
- B)** No. 8 stranded / a minimum of 3 inches beneath or embedded in the walk surface / 36 inches
- C)** No. 6 solid / 24 inches beneath the service entrance equipment / 42 inches
- D)** No. 4 solid / no requirement / 48 inches

**Answer: A**

**Explanation:** A new article was added to the 2005 NEC covering electrical wiring and equipment in or adjacent to bodies of waters. Section 682.33 of Article 682, Natural and Artificially Made Bodies of Water, requires an equipotential plane (ground grid) beneath and extending out 36 inches in all directions of service equipment and disconnecting means operated by personnel, where the disconnecting means and/or service equipment is used to control equipment in or on the water. In addition, Section 682.2 establishes a minimum 3-inch depth or embedment in the walk surface.

The requirements of this section are similar to the requirements in Section 680.26 for the grounding and bonding of swimming pools.

## Did Lack of Respect Lead to a Growing Labor Shortage?

By David Kusnet... This article originally appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*.

In the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, because of a shortage of skilled construction workers, families are waiting six months or more to move into their new homes. In Massachusetts, the state government is offering a \$20,000 signing bonus for new teachers. In Detroit, the auto companies are worrying what will happen when the current corps of tool-and-diemakers -- most of them over 50 -- retire in just a few years. And, in California, even after convincing Congress to let them import more foreign computer professionals, high-tech companies say they still can't find enough skilled employees. These seemingly unrelated headlines tell the story of a fast-emerging but still largely unexamined problem: In important occupations - from skilled blue-collar jobs to poorly paid professional positions - employers seem unable to recruit and retain good workers. To the extent that opinion leaders and policymakers have addressed this problem at all, they've offered two comforting but inadequate explanations.

First, they say, a labor shortage is a good problem to have -- a sign the economy is growing so fast it's swallowing up the supply of willing workers. Second, they add, if there's any problem, it's a "skills shortage" -- too few well-trained people to fill too many demanding jobs.

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## ***...Continued from Page 4...* Did Lack of Respect Lead to a Growing Labor Shortage?**

But what if other explanations are at work as well? What if our economy is unprepared to offer rewarding and stable careers to skilled workers without prestigious credentials? And what if our culture also refuses to respect the contributions of workers in unglamorous jobs -- from computer "geeks" to "construction" hardhats -- encouraging ambitious people to overlook these occupations and pinch-penny employers to under-value them?

A closer look at conditions in four of these jobs -- construction, skilled factory work, classroom teaching, and information technology -- suggests that Americans downgrade the very jobs where skilled workers are in short supply.

In construction, for instance, recent surveys by business groups, from the Business Roundtable to the National Association of Home Builders, find developers fretting about the lack of skilled craft workers, from carpenters and electricians to pipefitters and welders.

But it wasn't long ago that some of the same business groups, together with the Associated Builders and Contractors, were working overtime to drive down wages and drive out unions in their industry.

In large measure, they succeeded. In spite of a recent uptick, construction workers wages, adjusted for inflation, are well below their high-point in the late 1960s and early 70s. And union membership has declined as well, from 40% of the total workforce during the 1970s to scarcely 20% today.

But lower wages mean fewer young workers are attracted to construction. And the drop in union membership also means a decline in workers' skills, since fewer recent hires have participated in the apprenticeship programs jointly operated by unions and contractors.

To be sure, the culture takes its toll, too. Young people who don't go to college are seen as "failures," and fewer native-born Americans want to work with their hands, outdoors -- at any wage.

Something similar is happening with skilled factory work. In the auto industry, skilled workers are mostly more than 50 years old.

They're nearing retirement in an industry where workers qualify for pensions after 30 years on the job. And relatively few young people are taking their place.

As for skilled machinists, they're average age is also over 50, and many are approaching retirement as well. And only 15,000 young people become machinists each year, leaving 30,000 jobs unfilled.

Just as the construction industry is paying the price for breaking its unions, such industries as auto and aerospace are footing the bill for downsizing their workforces. With the factory closings and massive layoffs of the early 1980's, many workers in skilled trades such as welders, electricians, machinists, and tool-and-diemakers, lost their jobs, and many companies disbanded their apprenticeship programs. This broke the longstanding link between generations of skilled factory workers. And, even today, the memory of what happened to fathers, uncles, and older brothers discourages younger folks from following them.

At first glance, classrooms seem worlds apart from construction sites and factory floors, but, with teachers, too, America gets what it pays for. As today's teachers retire, the public schools will need to hire two million new teachers over the next decade. Already, school systems say they can't find enough good ones. Across the nation, some 36% of public school teachers had neither a major nor a minor in the subject they teach. About 6.5% of the new teachers hired each year come with emergency credentials. And, even in highbrow Massachusetts, nearly 60% of prospective teachers failed a competency test -- thus, the state's \$20,000 bounty for capable new teachers.

In the past, school systems could find high-quality teachers because well-educated women couldn't find better jobs. Now, with discrimination declining, teacher salaries are still lagging -- about \$25,000 for newcomers in most states. That's much lower than most other professions, and, unlike almost any other professional, teachers don't enjoy such amenities as cubicles, computers, or even telephones of their own. These problems point to why the United States prepares nearly twice as many new teachers each year as actually enter teaching, and why some 30% of new teachers leave after five years on the job.

But what, then, of the new economy's supposed stars - information technology workers? To hear the high-tech industry tell it, they have about 350,000 job openings for skilled workers, particularly computer programmers and engineers and systems analysts. That was why, last year, Congress passed, and the Clinton Administration approved, increasing special visas for foreign information technology workers from 65,000 to 115,000 a year for 1999 and 2000.

But, on closer examination, it seems the industry wants cheap and disposable workers at least as much as skilled ones. Perhaps because employers have been able to hire so many well-trained, low-paid, and hard-working immigrants, pay scales have generally risen at no higher rate than for the workforce at large. With long hours and high stress, computer programming in particular is a young person's job: Fewer than 20% remain in the industry after 20 years. And few leading companies offer training for veteran programmers to help them upgrade and update their skills.

All this suggests that, whether the nation is looking for better teachers or tool-and-diemakers, plumbers or programmers, we'd better ask ourselves how these occupations must appear to young people choosing their life's work. Can we claim that, if they prepare for these careers, they can look forward to secure jobs with rising wages and at least a little respect from their family, friends, and neighbors? Or is our economy too enthralled with "flexibility" and our popular culture too enamored with glitz and glamour for even a booming America to promise the skilled workers it needs the rewards they deserve?

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Most of you already know Local 22 has a website with many useful informational areas and links. For those of you who haven't visited our site, you can find us at : <http://www.ibew22.org> Many of your questions can be answered there.

One place of special interest to you maybe found under the "Employment" drop-down menu. You'll find a sub-menu titled "Job Referrals." Here you will find available job calls for the next business day. These listings include Commercial/Industrial, Residential, and Tele-Communication/Low Voltage jobs.

You can also check our job listings by calling the Job line at 402-331-8452. And as always, if you have any question pertaining to the Local or the IBEW, please call Brett or Brad at 402-331-8147.

Remember, You can view our web site at:

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