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Xcel Energy Information Request No. 1
Docket No.: G002/M-25-31
Response To: Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
Requestor: Tera Dornfeld, Alyssa Kennedy
Date Received: March 4, 2026

Question:

Will Xcel please provide annual “zero-out” data from the Company dating back to 2017? If providing zero-out data is not possible, please explain why.

Zero-out data is defined as the number of customers who choose to ‘zero-out’ of an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) menu.

Staff makes this request because previously, in the Order issued March 17, 2015, in docket no. G008/M-14-316, to which Department comments were appended, the Department recommended that CenterPoint Energy provide “data regarding customers who choose to zero out of a menu while interacting with IVR.” The Department noted that zeroing out “is a common complaint in many IVR systems and can lead to customer fatigue and frustration...The comparison of [the number of customers that zero out of a menu while interacting with the IVR menu] to the difference between the call response data, including and excluding IVR, would provide the Department with a clearer picture of the effectiveness of CenterPoint’s IVR system and the level to which customers’ expectations are satisfied.”

While the Department was, at that time, trying to understand the implications of a newer system (IVR), we are now requesting zero-out data from other rate-regulated gas utilities, with applicable systems, to understand customers’ experiences with IVR.

Response:

We begin our response by addressing gas-related calls – not because these represent the majority of calls handled, but because this Information Request is filed in the Gas Service Quality docket (G002/M-25-31) so we assume gas-related calls are of special interest to Staff here.

Xcel Energy provides a dedicated phone number for callers with gas emergencies (1-800-895-2999). Until June 2025, callers were presented a navigation menu with no IVR transaction functionality. Callers had three options: press one if calling about a gas leak or gas emergency, press two for all other matters, or press three for Spanish.

Option one routed the caller directly to a live agent trained to address their gas emergency call. Option two routed the call to the main menu for general customer service inquiries (1-800-895-4999). And option three routed the caller to a submenu in Spanish - press one to speak with an agent for a gas issue, or two for all other matters (which then provided a Spanish language main menu).

In June 2025, the navigation menu for the dedicated gas emergency line was removed and callers were presented with the same main menu as calls to the general customer service telephone number. This was done to eliminate caller confusion - menu selection data reflected that over 60% of callers selected the non-gas emergency option. Additionally, consolidating the call routing options for the two telephone numbers into a single platform would be easier to administer and less expensive to maintain.

The main menu for general customer service inquiries provides eight navigation options noted below.

- One for gas smell, leak or other gas problem – this option routes the caller directly to a live agent (similar to pre-June 2025, callers receive no IVR functionality)
- Two for electric power outage
- Three for billing and payment matters
- Four for moving or new construction
- Five for all other matters
- Six for Spanish
- Seven to repeat these options
- Zero to speak with a live agent is always available, but not verbally presented to the caller unless they listen to the main menu more than once

After selecting an option from the main menu that contains IVR functions, callers are provided with a consistent navigation submenu where applicable: press seven to repeat options, press eight to return to the prior menu, press nine to return to the main menu and press zero to speak with a live agent. This submenu is provided in addition to any navigation menu options that align with the transaction steps – example: callers who select electric power outage from the main menu may choose to report a streetlight outage from the transaction submenu and are routed to a live agent to complete their transaction. These callers are not required to press zero.

The volume of callers who select individual prompts to speak with a live agent can be compiled to track problems or issues with the call flow, but is not a regular reporting metric tracked by the company. Xcel Energy groups all callers who select any option to route to a live agent into a single “opt-out” of the IVR category. The table below reflects the volume of all Minnesota callers who selected any option to speak with a

live agent at any/every point in any navigation menu for 2017 through 2025. The Company has multiple pathways for customers to navigate through IVR and, if desired, speak to a live agent.

Year	Annual Opt-out calls	Percent Opt Out	Total calls
2017	925,964	27%	3,371,467
2018	539,930	17%	3,267,966
2019	509,745	16%	3,129,672
2020	456,903	16%	2,813,503
2021	452,783	17%	2,685,647
2022	513,167	18%	2,901,440
2023	548,958	18%	2,998,374
2024	528,959	16%	3,370,761
2025	596,781	20%	2,986,657

Note: The 2017 data are not directly comparable to subsequent years because they reflect different contact center operating hours. Prior to January 2018, agents were available to handle all types of calls 24/7. After this date, agents remained staffed to handle gas and electric emergency calls 24/7, but the business hours timeframe to handle general inquiries was reduced. These operating hours changes required adjustments to the navigation and call routing environment.

Xcel Energy’s IVR application is generally top quartile within our industry for the percentage of customers that completely self-serve within our automated voice system. Additionally, IVR is typically our highest channel for customer satisfaction. Overall, the Company’s experience is that customers find IVR a valuable tool for accessing quick and clear information. We work on an ongoing basis to improve IVR functionality to make it even easier and more valuable for customers.

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