

Utility's Dispatching Recharge

Nueces Electric Cooperative improved efficiency and customer service with real-time fleet tracking.

Nueces Electric Cooperative serves approximately 20,000 members in South Texas. With a customer density of about five customers per mile, getting a technician to a job can be time-consuming. Nueces recently deployed a fleet tracking solution that provides real-time location data on all of its trucks and provides dispatchers with a map view of the entire fleet. As a result, the utility has improved service response times and increased dispatching efficiency and safety.

Originally, Nueces divided its service area into sectors, with trucks assigned to each sector. "Regardless of where the technician was, if there was an outage, the dispatcher would blindly call the driver associated with that sector," says Avan Irani, project manager at Nueces. "There may have been another truck nearby, but that truck didn't get the call because we didn't know where it was." Three years ago, Nueces upgraded its mapping tool to a product from Milsoft Utility Solutions, the software company that provides Nueces' engineering analysis system. When the co-op mentioned that it wanted to add vehicles to the mapping solution, Milsoft pointed it to strategic partner Wireless Matrix.

By using the Wireless Matrix FleetOutlook GPS system, Irani says the company could integrate fleet tracking with its existing systems. "We wanted our trucks to be displayed within the mapping tool," Irani says. "Handling the installation of the GPS equipment internally made the solution more affordable." Nueces staff installed the small GPS locator units initially on 20 trucks. Once Wireless Matrix activated the units, the system was up and running overnight. Dispatchers could log in to the online solution and had immediate access to location data. "There's no special software," Irani says. "You log in through the browser, and you're ready to go. The dispatcher can track where a trouble ticket is located and dispatch the nearest truck."

GPS Data Improves Driver Safety, Customer Service

When an outage occurs, dispatchers use the mapping system to determine the source of

the outage, find the nearest truck using the Wireless Matrix solution, and radio the closest driver. The type of truck each driver has (bucket truck, meter truck, etc.) is indicated by an icon on the map, so dispatchers know the technician will arrive with the proper equipment. Nueces can generate reports on driver speeds and idle times and can even create "bread crumb" reports to show where drivers have traveled throughout the day. These reports help improve safety. "If we have a Mayday call, we can dispatch help directly to the GPS location of the truck," Irani says. "We haven't had to use that functionality, but we have been able to send help when a truck gets stuck or breaks down because we have the exact location." Since driver behavior is tracked, Nueces has corrected issues with speeding and overlong idling. "We've reduced idle times, and we can track how many stops the techs are performing in a day," Irani says.

Since dispatchers can locate the closest truck during an outage, response times have improved (the company has not tracked how much time has been saved). "We can also provide more information to our members. When there's an outage, especially a longer one, members keep calling in wanting to know what is going on. In the past we could only tell them that a crew had been dispatched. Now we can let them know the crew is on-site," Irani says.

Nueces recently added a maintenance module that sends alerts when trucks are due for regular maintenance (oil changes or inspections). Since the initial installation, the company has expanded the deployment to 34 vehicles. While the company hasn't yet integrated the Wireless Matrix solution with the Milsoft mapping system, it will do so soon. Nueces is also working with the company that provides its billing system to upgrade its customer information system. Once that upgrade is complete, Nueces will be able to deploy the mobile workforce management solution which, when integrated with Wireless Matrix, will allow Nueces to dispatch service order and trouble tickets automatically through computers mounted in the vehicles. •



By using the Wireless Matrix FleetOutlook GPS system, Nueces Electric Cooperative has reduced response times significantly.