



Wireless RF Meter System Bails Out Rural Water System After Hurricane Ivan Damage

December 16, 2004 — Anyone managing a rural water system knows to expect the unexpected from nature: High winds may knock a tree across a road and heavy rains can sometimes overflow a creek, causing hassles in providing normal services. Then there's the really unexpected surprise.

That's what happened in September 2004 in Uriah, Alabama, when Hurricane Ivan came roaring through. Although Uriah is about 80 miles from the Gulf Coast, the tremendous winds downed hundreds of trees and the torrential rainfall flooded huge areas, including many water meter pits.

To top it off, the hurricane blasted the area just a couple of days before the Uriah Water System was scheduled to perform its monthly meter reading. Crews were busy dealing with storm damage, and it looked doubtful they would be able to conduct the reading cycle, especially since Uriah's 1,100 customers are spread along 170 miles of paved, gravel and dirt roads.

A RAY OF SUNSHINE

It turned out that a decision made six months earlier saved the day. In March 2004, Uriah Water System had switched its old system of manual-read water meters to a new, high-tech system the DIALOG 3G™ Wireless RF System from Master Meter Inc., a Mansfield, Texas-based water meter manufacturer.

"We honestly did not think we would be able to get many readings so soon after the hurricane," said Linda Scruggs, office manager for the Uriah Water System. "We knew there were a lot of trees down which would block us from parts of our routes, and that lots of pits would be completely under water, or covered in mud and other debris."

Scruggs was in for a pleasant surprise.

CAPTURED READINGS AND A BONUS

"We sent the crews out anyway, and they got every single reading, even from neighborhoods we couldn't get near!" she said. "The readings came through just like before the storm."

As an added bonus, the DIALOG 3G units also automatically transmitted leak alarms to alert the crews of water pipes which had been damaged by uprooted trees.

"Getting those alarms so soon after the hurricane helped us coordinate our repair plan more efficiently to avoid further damage to the system," Scruggs said. "The alarms saved us from losing valuable water, and they saved our customers from some huge water bills."

Scruggs credits her crews' hard work and the reliability of the 3G units as key factors in allowing the Uriah Water System to provide service to its customers without interruption after the disaster, and maintain its regular reading/billing cycle.

OTHER SYSTEM BENEFITS

Scruggs said the DIALOG 3G product has several other distinct features which make it a difference in Hurricane Ivan:

- It is completely wireless, with no external wiring or antenna exposed to break, insect damage or wetness.
- It is preprogrammed at the factory, self-activates as water starts to flow, and provides detection against tampering, leaks and backflow.
- It features a waterproof glass seal within a stainless steel base, and is powered with 10-year lithium batteries.

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LABOR SAVINGS, TOO

Uriah used to send out three meter readers in three trucks to work three full days to get readings with the old direct-read system. After installing the DIALOG 3G system, the crew was reduced to just one man driving one truck.

In addition to the labor savings, Scruggs said repair and maintenance costs on the vehicles have been reduced, since trucks are not on the 170 miles of rough roads as much and are no longer forced to stop-and-start constantly.

The staff doing the readings appreciates the new system also, because they can gather readings from the safety and comfort of the truck.

THE AFTERMATH

While the worst hurricane in recent history did wreak havoc on the countryside, the Uriah Water System successfully weathered the storm.

"Our new meter system took on the hurricane and kept functioning, helped find hidden pipe damage, and maintained its data broadcasting ability for the drive-by collections," Scruggs said. "I couldn't ask for much more."

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