PWD Plans for Paradigm Shift in Customer Service

Has this situation ever happened to you or someone you know? A hidden plumbing leak only becomes apparent when you receive that $200 water bill. And to top it off, the leak has continued through the next water billing cycle! So, even though the leak was repaired quickly, your next water bill is extremely high too. Frustration, anger, helplessness sweep over you—why can’t someone come up with a system that tells me I have a leak before I get this huge bill? Well, Powdersville Water District (PWD) is working on remedying this situation.

PWD is pleased to announce a pilot study of the advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) meter reading system. AMI is the industry name given to a metering system that uses towers to read customers’ meters several times a day, instead of the current PWD system that uses a drive-by method and only reads the meters once per month. If the pilot is successful, full implementation of the system will commence in mid-2014. The project should take about 18 months to complete and could be fully functional as soon as December 2015.

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How does AMI work?
The AMI system will use towers to transmit a signal to each meter to upload the reading from the customer’s meter. PWD will eventually have four towers that will read its meters multiple times per day. These readings will be uploaded to a server where they will be managed by PWD for monthly billing, as well as daily monitoring for leaks, stopped meters, excessive readings, water theft and area-wide system leakage.

What are the benefits of AMI?
The AMI system will be able to provide real-time data that can be used in a variety of ways to fulfill PWD’s stated mission to “provide a safe and dependable supply of drinking water to the community, and to all customers within our service area. In providing this service, we seek to provide abundant and affordable drinking water in a manner that promotes efficient and reliable service.” AMI will help accomplish this in the following ways:

- Increased monitoring of usage will lower costs to customers by detecting customer leaks sooner. Currently, small leaks on the customer side of the meter are not revealed until the customer bill is issued. Under AMI, these leaks could be detected during the first few days, avoiding a waste of drinking water and a high bill. More detailed records of a customer’s daily usage will assist both PWD and the customer in determining the cause of a high bill. For example, a continuous flow through the meter during the wee hours of the morning could indicate a running toilet.
- Detecting leaks sooner will foster better conservation of the precious resource PWD and its customers have been entrusted with.
- Incidences of meter tampering will be detected, thus reducing the likelihood of water theft.
- Meter irregularities will be reported by AMI on a daily basis, smoothing out the meter maintenance load, since service orders will be issued daily instead of once per month.
Dyke Spencer, Executive Director, for Powdersville Water District received the Herman F. Wiedeman Award last year at the South Carolina Environmental Conference. This prestigious award is presented annually by the South Carolina Section of the American Water Works Association (SCAWWA) to a member who has actively engaged in the water supply profession and has contributed substantially toward achievement and science of the water supply industry in the Section.

Janice Perry, Customer Service Manager and Public Relations Coordinator for Powdersville Water District, received the L.A. Graham Leadership in Management Award at the South Carolina Environmental Conference held in March 2014, at Myrtle Beach.

What changes will you see when AMI is fully implemented?

- AMI will result in less miles being driven to read meters, thus yielding two important results: increased safety for PWD employees and a greener impact on the environment.
- PWD will be able to monitor entire sections of the service area to determine if water is being lost via leakage. AMI will allow PWD to isolate the area where water losses are indicated in the distribution system. Real time peak and average demands will be easier to determine so as to optimize the water distribution system infrastructure.
- PWD customers will be notified if a leak is suspected on their property.
- In order to enhance the power of AMI, all customer accounts will be billed in gallons, instead of thousands of gallons. The reason for this is two-fold. First, this will reinforce the importance of conserving each gallon of water. Second, it will allow the AMI system to track more accurately the water being used by the customer in order to isolate the cause of a high bill.
- Customers should notice that their bills will generally reflect meter readings on the same day of the month and therefore will be easier to compare with the same month from the prior year, since the number of days each month will be consistent.

In summary, PWD would like to use this technology to swing customer service 180 degrees from where it is right now. Our goal is to move from responding only when you have a complaint (e.g., the high water bill mentioned in the first paragraph) to using this technology to proactively assist you in avoiding the cause of the complaint in the first place. Hopefully, this will allow us to help you gain some control over formerly uncontrollable events and also to help us become partners with you as we learn new and innovative ways to conserve this precious resource.

“PWD would like to use this technology to swing customer service 180 degrees.”

–Executive Director

Message from the Manager

The phrase of the day is “paradigm shift”. The word paradigm is derived from the Greek word “paradigma” meaning model. Therefore, a paradigm shift occurs when the existing model is discontinued and a new one takes its place. PWD is initiating just such a paradigm shift that we think will turn the historic model of operating a water utility on its head. The majority of this newsletter is devoted to unveiling an exciting new technology (AMI) that we think will forever change the way PWD interacts with its customers. I encourage you to read about AMI and just close your eyes for a minute and think of the possibilities. Then you will be right where we are—working together to make a brighter future!

Thank you,
Dyke Spencer,
Executive Director

Employee Spotlight

PWD Employees Receive Awards
Who We Are
Powdersville Water District is a special purpose district operated by an accomplished team of professionals. We are dedicated to serving our customers in the most efficient matter.

Mission Statement
The mission of Powdersville Water District is to provide a safe and dependable supply of drinking water to the community, and to all customers within our service area. In providing this service, we seek to provide abundant and affordable drinking water in a manner that promotes efficient and reliable service.

Joint Project for Powdersville Water District and Easley Combined Utilities
Powdersville Water District (PWD) and Easley Combined Utilities (ECU) recently completed a joint project to improve the water service in their respective service areas. The Crestview Project included the installation of 8,100 LF of 16-inch ductile iron pipe. Of this total, 4,700 LF lies in the PWD service area and 3,400 LF lies in the ECU service area. The project began at Sheffield Road and ended at Old Pendleton Road. The new water main was an upgrade for an existing connection with ECU by connecting it to an existing 18-inch PWD water main. This project improved PWD’s service level in that it will insure that adequate water pressure and fire flows are maintained in the most populated portion of PWD’s service area during peaks in customer water usage. Work began on the project in June, 2013, and was completed in February, 2014. The total cost of the project will be approximately $938,000 to be shared by PWD and ECU according to the cost of each utility’s segment.

Your Water District was formed in 1971.

- Richard Nixon was President
- All in the Family was the leading TV show
- A postage stamp was 8 cents
- A dozen eggs was 25 cents
- A gallon of gas was 40 cents
- A movie ticket was $1.50

A lot has changed since then—but one thing has not changed:

Drinking water is still a bargain! You can get 10 gallons, delivered, for less than 5 cents!