

CASE STUDY

Badger[®] ORION[®]

Radio Frequency System



Badger Meter's ORION[®] Radio Frequency System

Badger[®] ORION[®] System Helps Lemmon, South Dakota Reduce Read Time, Billing Cycles

By: Kevin Orfield

Aptly named after its founder, cattle rancher George Edward Lemmon, the City of Lemmon, South Dakota, is surrounded by sprawling ranches, farms, and prairies. Each year, the town of 1,400 honors its namesake – one of the first South Dakotans inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame – with the Boss Cowman Rodeo Celebration. Lemmon is also home to the world's largest petrified wood park, which covers an entire city block.

If you were to ask Art Pederson, Lemmon's water superintendent, he might tell you the wood park wasn't the only thing in Lemmon that was petrified. "When I first came to Lemmon in July 1979, our water system had five or six different kinds of meters and they were old museum pieces," he recalled. "That was unacceptable because it made it difficult if not impossible to repair and maintain the meters."

At the time, Lemmon was in the process of converting to the Perkins County Rural Water System and changing over its meters. "We had several companies present to us about their water meter solutions and Badger Meter gave the best presentation," Pederson recalled. "From then on, every time a meter would go bad, I'd change it to a Badger[®] meter."

In December 2003, Lemmon began installing the Badger ORION automatic meter reading system (AMR). In February 2004, a Badger Meter representative arrived in the middle of a blizzard to train Lemmon on using the Badger ORION system.

"He taught us how to run the system and read meters," recalled Barb Bartell, assistant finance officer. "He was terrific. He sat and listened to us and answered all our questions. And once we got started with installation, we could call him anytime and he'd tell us exactly what we needed to do."

Reduced billing cycles

With the old system, customers manually recorded meter reads on reader cards, which were sent to Bartell. She would then enter each card, one by one into a computer.

"It would take days to get all of the information from people and enter it into the system," she explained. "And even then, I'd have to send Art out to get some

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reads because people wouldn't send them in. It took a long time to generate a bill."

Using the Badger® ORION® system, meter reading is much faster. "Now I can go out with my reader and in two hours or less, I generally have everything read," said Bartell.

Badger® CONNECT software is easy to learn and use. The custom report builder helps manage readers and the Badger ORION system. "When we need information, it's amazing what Barb can come up with for us," reported Pederson.

Badger CONNECT makes it easy to download the reads for billing. "It works really well with utility billing," said Bartell. "It's an awesome program – there's simply nothing that compares."

Since installing the Badger ORION system, billing cycles have been reduced from once a quarter to every month. Monthly billing has helped improve cash flow, while significantly reducing delinquent payments. Customers have become much more diligent about paying on a monthly basis with the threat of having their water cut off more imminent. Delinquents have been reduced from 15 to 20 per month, to just four or five.

Quick, cost-effective install

Installation began in December 2003 and was completed August

2004. Approximately 675 meters were installed.

Pederson appreciates how Badger Meter's long-life Recordall® Disc Series meters are so easy to install and repair.

Most of the original meters were mounted perpendicularly, but Badger Meter recommended installing all the new meters to lay flat so they would record accurately. Pederson was able to find meter setters with backflow preventers that made it easy to install the meters correctly.

"The meter setters have worked out very well for us and take only 12 minutes per meter to install," said Pederson. "And at only \$33 a piece, they cost much less than the \$100 to \$200 a plumber had estimated it would cost to changeover each meter."

Leak detection benefits customers

Badger ORION's leak detection option makes it easy for Lemmon to help customers find leaks. Every time the route is read, a report identifies customers with leak problems and a letter is mailed to each customer. If the customer can't locate the leak, Pederson will go over and try to help locate it.

"Our people really appreciate our leak notice," reported Bartell. "Occasionally you'll have a customer who has reverse osmosis or an ice

machine that shows up as a leak. But I've had people who insist that they don't have a leak only to find out they have a stool running 24/7.

"We had a customer who showed up on the leak report who couldn't understand why his water bill was so high. Art went over and found a stool with water running right through it. I even showed up on the leak report one day and sure enough, when I got home, I found a spigot that had frozen up and was dripping water."

The City of Lemmon has recommended the Badger ORION system to a number of other water systems. "We should get a commission," joked Pederson.

Many of these systems have visited Lemmon to observe firsthand how easy Badger ORION is to run. Lemmon's water source, the Perkins County Rural Water System, is strongly considering Badger ORION after discovering the meters it currently uses fail within 6 to 12 months.

"Everyone I talk to thinks ORION is great," said Bartell. "It's been a super system for us. I can't say enough about it." ■