

## CASE STUDY

# ORION®

## Radio Frequency System



East Longmeadow Department of Public Works' Mike Ciepiela and Tom Anderson

## A Smooth Transition from Read-o-Matic® to ORION®

By: Ted Schaar

For many years, the East Longmeadow, Massachusetts, Department of Public Works relied on a Badger Meter Read-o-Matic® system to measure how much water customers used.

“Read-o-Matic allowed us to run a wire from the meter in the basement to a dial located on the exterior of the house,” said Senior Project Manager Sean Kelley. “Our readers no longer had to enter homes, and it made things go a lot faster.”

### Settled in the 1700s

East Longmeadow is in the central part of Massachusetts, about 100 miles southwest of Boston. The town was settled in 1740 and now has a population of nearly 15,000. Water is purchased from nearby Springfield, which draws it from two reservoirs located about 20 miles away, on Cobble Mountain.

The Read-o-Matic system was a major improvement, but public works personnel still needed to walk routes and record readings by hand. “This inevitably led to data entry errors,” Kelley recalled, “because people had to deal with so many numbers.”

### ORION® selected through bidding process

In 2003, Kelley began investigating ways of modernizing the system. “Our primary motivations were improving efficiency and accuracy,” he said, “so we put together a request for proposal and sent it to suppliers, including the Stiles Company, which represented Badger Meter.”

ORION was selected, Kelley continued, “because the price was competitive, it had excellent features, and we regarded it as straightforward to install—a true ‘plug and play’ system.” It turned out that ORION was even easier to install than Kelley thought it would be.

### Installation ahead of schedule

“East Longmeadow is doing the installation with their own people, and they are way ahead of schedule,” said Stiles Company Sales Representative Scott Fitzgerald.

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#### About the Author:

Ted Schaar is a freelance writer based in Brookfield, Wisconsin.

LONGMEADOW CASE



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Kelley explained: “Initially, we estimated it would take an hour in each residence to do the upgrade, and we sent out a two-person crew for safety reasons. Once we gained experience, we found one technician could do a conversion in ten minutes. Now we hope to complete the project in two years instead of five.”

Another reason the installation has gone smoothly, according to Kelley, is the cooperation of East Longmeadow citizens. “They’ve been very responsive,” he said. “Because of two-income households, we’ve had to work some weekends and evenings to gain access, but for the most part, residents have bent over backwards to accommodate us.”

### Chief of police helps out

One exception Kelly recalled was an elderly lady. “She lived alone and was reluctant to allow a stranger into her home,” he said, “even though I assured her the technician was trustworthy and would only stay a short time. One day, I was talking with her on the phone and asked if she would let the technician in if the police chief accompanied him. She brightened immediately, and said she would because she had gone to high school with him! The chief was happy to help out.”



*East Longmeadow Department of Public Work's  
Mike Ciepiela and Tom Anderson*

### Global positioning selected

East Longmeadow purchased the global positioning system (GPS) option and is integrating it with the town’s geographic information services (GIS) system. “The goal of GIS is to collect helpful information, from the assessor’s statement to meter readings, and put it online for the use of citizens,” Kelley said. “ORION® is helping to make this a reality.”

Utility Processor Sherri Herrick-St. Pierre said the new ORION system is already paying for itself. “I’m responsible for invoicing, and now that we’re doing a direct download from the ORION laptop to our billing software, we’ve increased our efficiency tremendously. We’re also moving from billing twice a year to billing

four times a year, so we’ll be picking up revenue dollars a little quicker, too.”

### Leak detection appreciated

ORION’s leak detection system has also proved advantageous, according to Herrick-St. Pierre. “We only have about 1,000 or so of the 7,500 meters converted to ORION, but we’ve already had cases where we detected leaks. One customer had a toilet valve problem so severe it might have cost him hundreds, maybe thousands of dollars, if ORION hadn’t caught it. He was grateful when we called to let him know.”

### Going the extra mile

In praising the performance of Badger Meter and Stiles, Kelley pointed to the service he received when it came to meeting the needs of East Longmeadow manufacturers. “Scott, our sales rep, did things like supply extra-long lead wires so we could mount the register-transmitters on exterior walls, making it much easier to get reads. In the case of Milton Bradley—the largest company in town with a plant that covers 20 acres—the lead wires are 200 feet long and we installed 20 meters. That’s service over and above what the average supplier would do. Everyone we worked with from Badger and Stiles was excellent.” ■