

CASE STUDY

ORION®

Radio Frequency System



Badger Meter's ORION® Radio Frequency System

Labor Savings to Pay for Eagle Point's ORION® System

By: Dave Marsh

According to the US Census the City of Eagle Point grew 38.2% between 2000 and 2003, making it the fastest growing city in Oregon. Although growth is indicative of a healthy community, a city that grows this rapidly usually experiences some growing pains. Gary Shipley is Eagle Point's Public Works Manager and he works on the front lines providing the growing population with a wide range of city services. So when Shipley found his crew of four spending too much time reading water meters, he knew it was time to upgrade his manual read meter system to an automatic meter reading (AMR) system.

"In 2004 when we upgraded our system all four of our guys would spend an entire week just reading meters," said Shipley. "We're responsible for everything, paving streets, storm and water, parks, facility maintenance... you name it. And meter reading pre-empted all of it. We were adding 30 meters a month so the situation wasn't going to get any better."

As a result, the City of Eagle Point decided to upgrade its manual system to a state-of-the-art AMR system. Although Shipley evaluated a number of AMR systems, the city decided to install the Badger Meter ORION AMR system.

Eagle Point already had Badger® meters in the ground and Shipley was extremely happy with them. However to make sure that Badger's new meters were every bit as reliable as his old ones Shipley talked with other communities about their experiences with Badger's new ORION System. "They were very pleased with the accuracy, cost effectiveness, and trouble free operation," said Shipley. "They all highly recommended it."

Eagle Point invested in a mobile reader to read its new ORION equipped meters. "Now one guy can read all 2,500 meters in less than five hours with 100% accuracy, while driving down the street," said Shipley. "The ORION

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System solved a big problem for us. With our old system the office clerks would have to print out route sheets each month. Then our readers would walk the routes, open each meter box, read the meter and hopefully accurately write down the number. And of course they couldn't read when it was raining because the water would make the numbers run. With that many numbers being written down sometimes the guys would transpose numbers and write others in the wrong column. When that happened they'd have to go back and do a re-read and that would take even more time. Writing each reading down and then manually entering it into the billing software resulted in too many errors."

"We just figured it made sense to invest in proven technology to save money over the long-term," said Shipley. "The ORION® system is going to save us about 1,392 man hours a year. That's time our crew

could be doing something other than reading meters. Why pay highly skilled personnel \$15 to \$17 an hour just to read meters. In my proposal to the city the cost savings from greater productivity will provide a pay back to the city in only seven and a half years. An investment that pays for itself in that short of time? You can't beat it."

Shipley is pleased with the dramatic increases in productivity. But he's also pleased that the number of customer complaints has decreased. "Because of the time it took to manually read the entire city's meters a customer might have had his meter read on the 21st one month while on the next month his meter might have been read on the 28th. So customers would have long months and short months resulting in the size of their bills fluctuating," said Shipley. "Of course during the summer when people watered

their lawns the difference would be even greater. Although the bills averaged out over the long-term, the variances frequently resulted in customers questioning the accuracy of their bills. Now, with the ORION system, we read meters on the same date every month. The data is downloaded to ASP billing software, and within a couple of hours after reading the meters we're printing and mailing out water bills. Because customer bills are more consistent, they have more confidence in them."

Eagle Point faced the same challenges confronting many growing communities... how to serve an increasing population without adding people. They found the answer in Badger Meter's new ORION AMR system. A job that once took an entire staff a full week to do now can be completed by one person in a single day. ■