

CASE STUDY

ORION[®]

Radio Frequency System



Keith Solomon using the ORION[®] laptop and software to read the city's meters as he drives by.

ORION[®] Assists ACCESSplus[®] In Romeoville, Illinois

By: Ted Schaar

Romeoville, Illinois, is a village of about 31,000, located 32 miles southwest of Chicago. The Romeoville Water Department serves village residents along with 13,000 citizens who live in nearby unincorporated Plainfield.

Twelve wells, ranging in depth from 100 to 1,500 feet, are needed to meet the needs of Romeoville and Plainfield customers, who consume an average of some 4.5 million gallons every day. To obtain water usage data, Romeoville has primarily relied on Badger Meter's ACCESSplus[®] system, which uses customer telephone lines to transmit meter readings to the village's central computer. The growing use of cellular telephones, however, has made the village re-think its AMR strategy.

Meter connection often forgotten

"When people change their primary phone service to cellular," said Water Superintendent Chris Drey, "they often forget about the meter connection, so suddenly we stop getting readings."

Only about 200 have switched to cell-only service, Drey said, but he thinks the trend will continue. The Badger Meter ORION[®] system was selected to accommodate customers who no longer have landline telephones and is also being used for new homes and commercial accounts.

Snowbirds accommodated

In addition, ORION-equipped meters have been installed in a retirement community where some residents are "snowbirds," people who travel south for the winter. "Many times these folks turn off their phones when they leave," Drey said. "The ACCESSplus system couldn't read the meters so it flagged the accounts as 'delinquent,' and we would have to spend time tracking down the residents." ORION eliminates the problem because it can verify that a meter is operational even if no water is being used.

High-level decision

"The decision to go with ORION was made by Romeoville Mayor Fred Dewald, our Board of Trustees, Director of Public Works Dan Bromberek, and myself," Drey recalled. "One of

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ROMEOVILLE CASE



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our primary concerns was that we get a system that would use the same billing application as ACCESSplus®, and we achieved that with ORION®—both systems use Badger Meter's CONNECT software.”

Global positioning beneficial

The ORION global positioning system option was chosen because the water department's territory is spread over many square miles and there is a combination of ACCESSplus and ORION units. “With global positioning, our people are able to locate areas that have ORION units easily and quickly,” Drey said, “especially when using the Map View option. It's very efficient.”

ORS and ORION® Data Collector

Another ORION Reading System (ORS) feature Drey likes is the touch screen mobile reading system. “Everything we need is in a handy laptop that is very easy to use,” he said. “Our people can be ready to read meters in about five minutes.”

Drey also praised the ORION handheld data collector. “Along with getting reads, the ORION data collector allows us to reprogram meters that we are changing from ACCESSplus to ORION. It's pretty compact, and I feel better about taking it into basements and boiler rooms than the laptop, which is more sensitive to damage.”



Romeoville Water Department crew from Left to Right: Matt Congoran, Carl Groth, Ted Wright, Bill McCarthy, Chris Concannon, Mike Doretti, and Keith Solomon



Linda Spence recording the data from ORION® Data Collector handheld.

Manual reads assisted

A small percentage of the meters in Romeoville are still read manually, and the ORION data collector will be helpful in these cases, too. “In the future, our readers will be able to make simple, keyboard entries instead of having to write down a

bunch of numbers,” Drey said. “And when they return to the office, the reads can be downloaded directly by the Badger® CONNECT software, which will save time and eliminate a manual inputting step.”

Among the manually-read meters are a number that are installed in manholes. “Primarily the manholes are used for commercial accounts and city services such as park irrigation,” Drey pointed out. “They can be as much as eight feet deep, and we're experimenting with converting them to ORION so we can eliminate the need to send people into confined spaces for reads. We're having pretty good success so far.”

More ORION units than originally planned

In fact, the ORION system is working out so well, Drey said his department is changing out about 1,500 more meters than originally planned. “We've noticed that we're starting to have low battery situations with some ACCESSplus units,” he explained, “and it makes sense to change them to ORION while we're in the home rather than just changing out the battery. We've tracked this and we can actually install an ORION-ready meter faster than we can change the battery on an ACCESSplus meter.”

Drey concluded by saying Romeoville's relationship with Badger Meter is “excellent” and that he has yet to encounter an employee “who wasn't receptive and pleasant to deal with. They've all been great.” ■