

Customer Stories

Oklahoma Electric Cooperative

OEC: Staying connected, to support public safety

- **Agency/Organization Needs** – Linemen, other workers in the field need reliable communications so they can connect to each other and to public safety personnel.
- **Networking Solution** – With apps, tablets and phones, FirstNet is providing OEC connectivity in virtually every corner of its service area, helping to ensure reliable communications with public safety personnel and customers and its linemen and dispatch.
- **Agency value** – With a wide variety of challenging weather, OEC needs to be able to connect with public safety personnel to relay information quickly to help ensure safety for all.
- **Industry Focus** – Utility company
- **Size** – 252 connections for employees

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Communication within OEC and with public safety critical to help keep community safe

Oklahoma Electric Cooperative (OEC) is based in Norman, OK – probably best known for being the home of one of college football's most renowned teams. It serves seven counties, just over 47,000 people and 60,000 meters.

And it gets its share of natural disasters. The state is known for a wide variety of weather-related problems – from tornadoes to ice storms. That makes communication within OEC and with public safety personnel critical.

And that's why [OEC decided to join FirstNet](#).

"It's not just about keeping our linemen safe, it's also about keeping the public safe," said David Goodspeed, VP of Information Technology at OEC and president of OEC Fiber. "It's keeping communications open to where there's no question of what's happening, so we can all go home at night."

OEC works hand in hand with public safety personnel – such as fire, EMS and law enforcement – to help keep the community safe. And communication is incredibly vital in cases of downed poles or dangerous electrical wires to prevent injury.

Coverage issues

"Before joining the FirstNet program, a lot of our linemen in the field were not able to call into our control center and talk to

Communication vital for safety in case of downed poles, live electrical wires

them about a substation, or talk to them about downed lines,” said Goodspeed.

Travis Barton, a 12-year veteran of OEC who serves as an overhead construction lineman, said one of the dangers facing OEC crews and public safety personnel alike are downed power lines that are “hot.” That means they’re live and can be very dangerous, if not fatal, he said.

“It’s crucial to have the connectivity during a weather event,” said Barton. “I mean we’ve got guys working in front of us, working behind us. Being on overhead construction, if there are poles that go down, they could energize lines back onto us and it could be fatal.”

“Having that ability to connect and communicate with other people out in the field is very crucial to our well-being,” he added.

Not being able to communicate with each other also can mean a loss in productivity. And that would have a negative impact on members.

“When I started nine years ago, connectivity was very, very slim,” echoed Nate Hulse, a journeyman power lineman for OEC.

“You had paper maps. You had to use a computer that just had the map and that’s all that you had,” he said. “There was nothing dynamic about it. There was nothing user friendly about it. So, you better know where you’re at or the map does you no good.”

The right technology

Using FirstNet Ready® tablets allows the crews to map the locations, see what job reports have come in and work they have lined up for the day and communicate with each other.

“That way we can determine where we’re going, where other crews are,” said Jake Calvert, a district lineman for OEC. “We use it to determine upstream devices and downstream devices for the safety of other linemen working in the area.”



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David Goodspeed,
VP of Technology, OEC
and President, OEC Fiber

Risks of working a storm without right technology go up exponentially

Linemen can also pull up a map and relay information to each other.

“Once everybody is out, and you have some line that’s off and some line that’s on, it’s critical to be able to look and see where the crews are,” he added. “Then we can see if we need to open this set of switches to isolate this crew from what we’re fixing to heat up here.”

The risks of not being able to communicate during a storm are too great.

“The risks of working a storm without the technology that we have in place would go up exponentially,” Calvert said. “The speed and efficiency with which our crews work is awesome. But it can only be that awesome because we can communicate clearly, crew to crew and crew to headquarters, and keep everybody safe.”

Keeping OEC connected

FirstNet provides [OEC the connectivity](#) they need, no matter the situation. That’s true whether out in the



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Goodspeed: “Staying connected is critical... That’s why we’re on FirstNet.”

field, during and after storms and when there’s a population influx due to college students arriving at school.

“That’s a lot of connected devices that do a massive surge on our community for about eight-nine months out of the year,” says David Goodspeed. “What we’ve seen being a part of the FirstNet program is that we could have 25,000 people show up with five devices per person, or we could have 5,000 people show up. And it doesn’t matter.

“We don’t have to worry about that anymore,” he said. “We just know that being part of the FirstNet program has elevated us so it’s one of those things we just don’t have to worry about.”

Making the connection

With reliable connectivity from FirstNet, OEC is confident that it can handle whatever comes its way, said Goodspeed.

“For Oklahoma Electric Cooperative, staying connected is critical,” Goodspeed said. “No matter which part of the company you’re in, you have to be connected. You have to understand what’s happening because so many of our safety issues rely on that communication – whether you’re working with highway patrol, county sheriffs or local police departments.”

“That’s why we’re on FirstNet,” he added.



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