

NEWS FEATURE

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WESTAR ENERGY ADOPTS CUSTOMIZED WEATHER RISK MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS FOR SEVERE STORM RESPONSE

(WICHITA, Kan.) – When Westar Energy was faced with corporate-wide belt tightening, dozens of vendor services had to be cut. As a result, a 20+ -year relationship with WeatherData, the utility’s severe-weather risk management advisor, was eliminated. It was a tough economic decision in tough economic times. But as soon as the utility’s financial climate improved, WeatherData was on the priority list to be re-hired. For during the period when the utility operated without WeatherData, company managers increasingly recognized the role the forecasting company had played in aiding Westar Energy’s proactive storm damage response and resource-allocation companywide.

With more than 34,800 miles of electric distribution and transmission lines, Westar Energy covers the eastern third of Kansas. Crews frequently need to be shifted between the Wichita and Topeka operations centers to respond to weather-related outages. To make the best decisions regarding manpower and resource allocations, managers in both cities need simultaneous, real-time access to the same radar displays and weather risk forecasts.

To answer this need, WeatherData provides the utility with two key components of its weather risk management strategies and technologies: a customized version of SelectWarn®, WeatherData’s patented precision weather warning system and a password-protected website. All weather information is plotted on a GIS-based map that can be customized with multiple user-defined overlays such as elevations, topography and highways. In the case of Westar Energy, a GIS-based map of the company’s substations and power lines are overlaid on the radar – giving a precise picture of those stations and lines that lay in the storm’s path.

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“WeatherData has worked *with* us, creating forecasting models and severe weather warning information that is specific not only to utilities, but also specific to the geographic peculiarities of our coverage area,” said Phil Sadler, Westar Energy’s Senior Manager for Distribution System Operations.

“Some of our transmission lines are more than 100 miles long,” he explains. “When there’s a storm-related problem, we’ve typically had to drive or fly the route to pinpoint the source of trouble. SelectWarn cuts our damage assessment time significantly and helps us maneuver crews in the field far more efficiently.”

WeatherData has also customized its software to provide warnings *only* on weather events that Westar Energy determines will have a direct impact on operations. For example, since small hail or potential flooding have virtually no affect on the utility, WeatherData eliminates these unneeded warnings. However, detailed warnings are provided on weather such as high wind or heavy ice that do affect mission-critical activities. Such a sophisticated advance warning system allows Westar Energy to have crews mobilized and in position, ready to respond as soon as the all-clear is given.

“Utilities traditionally wait until a storm has completely passed before starting repairs,” Sadler said. “We’re transforming that philosophy, trying to be more proactive in the way we respond to severe weather.”

Like other utilities, Westar Energy has downsized its number of crews in recent years. Widespread storms across the Midwest often mean a shortage of crews everywhere, leaving several utilities to compete for any available outside assistance to help repair storm damage. In these situations, WeatherData’s storm tracking, projections and weather risk management assessments become especially valuable management tools for Westar Energy.

“If we’re going to need assistance, we have ample lead time to request help,” Sadler said. “And, when we know in advance that our crews won’t be needed for our own severe weather responses, we can more quickly come to the aid of other utilities who request help from us.”

Adds Doug Henry, Westar Energy’s Vice President for Power Delivery, “Many times, we’ve moved people out of Wichita and repositioned them across the state, even though other forecasters were making different predictions. When WeatherData says a storm is over, it’s over. They have never been wrong for us.”

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More WeatherData Advantages for Utility Transmission, Distribution, Generation and Trading

Since 1981, WeatherData has provided customized, mission-critical risk management solutions for utilities such as Westar Energy; Aquila Energy; Kansas City Power & Light; and Kansas Gas Service. WeatherData can customize any exact solution to meet a utility's transmission, distribution, generation or trading requirements, including:

StormHawk™, a hand-held GPS-based weather monitoring and forecasting device with moving map GPS technology, delivered onto a personal digital assistant. When placed inside the vehicles of utility crews, the real-time weather radar, detailed information on lightning, wind speed and event-driven weather warnings, and customizable GIS information can keep crews out of harm's way and let them know when storm activity has completely passed and it's safe to begin repairs.

Extreme Temperature Forecasting to aid utilities in making sound business decisions about generating, marketing and/or trading power on the open market. WeatherData offers the utility guaranteed accuracy in extreme temperature prediction – or the utility doesn't pay for the forecast.

WeatherData's integrated approach combines its patented forecasting software with scientific meteorological analysis and personal consultation. The company's SmartRAD software updates temperature and other data *every seven minutes* and provides customized forecasts via Internet, frame relay, fax and voice communications.

WeatherData is a commercial weather company providing weather risk management consulting and state-of-the-art weather forecasting and services to more than 200 utility, transportation, manufacturing, educational and governmental clients throughout the U.S., Canada and Mexico. For more information, visit www.weatherdata.com or www.storm-hawk.com.

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