

Fiber Cut Affects Henry County REMC's Office: CRC's Toll-Free Solution Proves Effective

On November 7, 2019, a contractor cut into telecom fiber that resulted in the loss of internet and phone service to several Indiana homes and business, including both primary AND backup service to the office of CRC member Henry County REMC in New Castle, Indiana. The cut occurred at a middle mile fiber used by both local telecom companies. Shannon Thom, the cooperative's CEO, was out of the office along with several other key employees when all communication was lost. When Thom received the call on his cell phone that local communications were down, he immediately sent a text message to CRC and, within a couple of minutes, member calls were being rerouted to CRC. Almost instantly, the utility's outage, billing and miscellaneous calls were being completed and, in most cases, without the callers' awareness that anything was different. In this case, CRC handled the utility's business-hours calls and outage dispatching for the next four hours until the local telecom rerouted the primary fiber connection. Since internet connection to the cooperative office was also interrupted, urgent and priority calls were delivered to key cooperative personnel via cell phone.

Why was it that easy? When Thom was hired to manage the co-op in 2013, one of his first initiatives was to use his IT background to build redundancy. Soon the utility joined CRC for call handling and after-hours dispatching and he quickly bought into to the idea of letting CRC set up and manage the routing of the cooperative's published toll-free number. The solution provides a bypass for a complete loss of local service, while also significantly reducing the chances that a member encounters a busy signal or ringing with no answer when local service is intact. or call 800-892-1578 and ask to speak to a regional business manager.

The concept:

- Route 100% of the co-op's calls through the toll-free service (by forwarding the utility's local number to the toll-free number at the Local Exchange Carrier),
- host the co-op's greeting and menu in the toll-free network, and
- distribute calls from the cloud based on the time of day and the reason for the call (outage, billing, or other).

This eliminates the need to forward calls from the co-op, which usually bottlenecks resulting in busy signals during outages and a point of complete failure during a commutations outage.

“Today’s low cost of using toll-free services, the concept of managing our call traffic from the cloud, and CRC’s willingness to administer all of it made it an easy decision for Henry County REMC,” Thom explained. “We have the ability to send our co-op’s calls to different locations based on normal operating rules. And in a situation like the November 7 fiber cut, we have Plan B options that we can use when any part of our normal call flow cannot get to the intended destination.”

For more information on CRC’s toll-free routing service using AT&T Toll-free Services, please contact Dan Otteson, senior regional business manager, at danotteson@crc.coop or 800.892.1578.

