

Co-op Plans to Automate Crew-Building

BY UTILITY PRODUCTS STAFF

Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative will deploy ARCOS LLC's Crew Manager software, so managers can automatically tap into a visual depiction of the location and status of crews working across SVEC's service territory. According to SVEC, once implemented, Crew Manager will also help the utility coordinate contractors and co-op crews working on large projects as well as restoring service after storms.

"During daily operations, Crew Manager will give us one place to get information about who is working, where they're working and what they're working on, with a click," says Bill Rees, manager of System Operations for SVEC. "The contractors working on our property can change daily, and they're managed separately, so it will increase our system's safety to know in real-time who's working and where."

Today, says Rees, visualizing where crews are working takes spreadsheets and phone calls exchanged between managers, operations coordinators, supervisors, and crews. SVEC will save time and get people where they're needed faster and with increased safety via Crew Manager.

"Using Crew Manager daily will maximize our return on investment," adds Jennifer Waddell, senior system operator for SVEC. "When we buy a piece of software, we have to have our ROI."

In 2010, SVEC implemented the ARCOS Callout and Scheduling Suite, which uses algorithms to call crews in



the order the utility's rules dictate for after-hours emergencies. Using a few keystrokes, system operators automatically identify available workers and assemble multi-person crews in minutes or less. According to Rees, automating callout was a first step toward automated resource management and "one of the best pieces of software ever brought into the operations center." SVEC sees Crew Manager as the next chapter in its automation story. Crew Manager complements Callout, says Rees, and will link daily and after-hours operations.

One of Crew Manager's benefits is identifying and coordinating resources for a forecasted storm. Managers can use the software to create different restoration scenarios in advance and see where gaps with resources

might exist. During a major restoration, SVEC's workforce can double (or triple) in size, so having one system in which the organization can see its mutual aid and contractor crews is incredibly important. SVEC will eventually use Crew Manager to coordinate its storm restoration. But Rees says SVEC's near-term focus is the daily use of Crew Manager, which will create familiarity with the system for quickly moving from blue-sky to dark-sky work.

For example, with Crew Manager, when SVEC System Operations is handling a major outage, operators will see which crews are working on each circuit and easily pinpoint who is the closest, available crew in the surrounding area to call on for added support if needed. 