

NORTH PLAINS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

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PORCHE TECHNOLOGY TO HELP RELIEVE OUTAGE FRUSTRATION

At NPEC, we understand that an outage can be a frustrating experience. We work hard to prevent them, but occasionally Mother Nature does not cooperate, or other factors beyond our control cause the inevitable. We also realize that not being able to report the outage due to busy signals, phone problems, etc., is even more frustrating.

Besides preventing outages, our next goal is to make necessary repairs as efficiently as possible. One vital part of the process of making repairs and restoring power is gathering information to determine the appropriate plan of action. We rely on you, the member, to let us know if there is a problem. Be assured that we want to hear from each of you, but occasionally in the past we have not been able to receive all the calls that are being made at a given moment. Consequently you get a busy signal or the phone is not answered in an appropriate amount of time. With a single dispatcher answering two lines, 40 to 50 calls easily overwhelm our answering service.

In October, North Plains Electric Co-op will implement a technology designed to assist us with this problem. The new system is called PORCHE IVR. PORCHE and IVR are acronyms for Primary Outage Response Call Hold Equipment and Interactive Voice Response. The technology will help NPEC members avoid the busy signals that often accompany the high volume of member calls caused by an outage. Although the name implies that this will be the primary system, it will be used as a backup and used only when call volumes are high and our normal dispatchers cannot answer all the

incoming calls.

Our dispatchers will continue to answer calls 24 hours a day. We hope this system will prevent those frustrating busy signals before they happen. As the name implies, it is interactive and requires only a voice response. During regular business hours, we typically have four incoming lines at our office and have several employees answering those lines. In the past, nighttime calls were forwarded to Perryton Answering Service; two lines were covered by this service. They were able to answer six calls per line at once before the line was busy.

With the PORCHE IVR, two lines will continue to be answered by the answering service and two additional lines will be answered by the new system. A member will only reach the PORCHE IVR if the first two lines are busy.

PORCHE IVR can process eight times the calls that a live operator could handle. Answering calls on all lines simultaneously, PORCHE IVR identifies callers, provides them with information on known outages, and leads them through the outage reporting process. It allows the member to get their call answered and conveniently report their outage. The system also provides instantaneous information on the outage to the dispatcher through a software package that helps us manage the outage.

If the PORCHE IVR answers your call, the system will ask you a few questions. You may simply answer the question vocally, or you can use the keypad on your phone. In reporting an outage, the system's first preference is meter number; however, it can also record the number from the phone

number associated with a specific meter.

A typical call will flow as follows (see flow chart):

A. Greet

Call is answered and member is informed that they have reached the North Plains Electric PORCHE IVR and that this call is being handled electronically.

B. Enter meter number

The caller is prompted for eight-digit meter number of the affected meter. This is the preferred method of reporting an outage.

C. Confirmation of meter

The system will read back the meter number for conformation. If the meter is correct, you will proceed directly to step F below.

D. Enter phone number

If the system cannot find the meter number or a number was not given, it will ask for a 10-digit phone number associated with the affected meter.

CONFIRMATION

The system will read back the service address (for example, residence). If multiple meters are matched with the phone number, the list is read back so you can choose the affected meter (step J on flow chart). After the information is confirmed, you will proceed to step F below.

E. No match

If no matches were found, the system will ask you to leave a recorded voice message with the name the account is listed under, a phone number where you can be reached, and the service address or any other information on the outage location that would assist our dispatcher. If you arrived at this step, after leaving a message, your call will end.

F. Problem

You will be asked if you have details about the outage that will assist the dispatcher.

G. Problem codes

If you answered “yes” to step F, a list of common problems will be presented, such as a broken pole, downed wire, etc. If the problem is not listed,

you will be prompted to leave a recorded message with the details.

H. Call back?

The system will ask you if you would like a call back to make sure your power was restored. If you answer “no” here, you will be routed to step I.

CALL-BACK NUMBER CONFIRMATION

You will be asked to confirm the phone number in our records as the call-back number.

ALTERNATE CALL-BACK NUMBER REQUEST

If the number in our records was not the correct call-back, you will be asked to leave a number for the system to call back to make sure your power was restored.

I. Closing

Call is completed and system confirms call back, if requested, and says goodbye.

This reporting process should only take about 1 to 2 minutes. Once the outage information is received, it will show up in the outage management software and notify the dispatcher so that a crew can be dispatched to restore power as soon as possible.

The goal of implementing this technology is to help members avoid busy signals and give a simple and quick alternative method to reporting an outage when call volumes are high. Because of the speed of the PORCHE IVR system, outage reports can be taken and processed faster. This system is not intended to be a substitute for a live dispatcher, someone who is responsive to your needs and questions. NPEC will continue to have that person available answering 12 calls at once. A member may simply have to wait until call volumes diminish to call back to speak to that live person.

If you have any questions about PORCHE IVR, or would like a free magnet to record your meter number(s), please contact Bill Carson at (806) 435-5482 or 1-800-272-5482.

