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Automated system handles outage reports efficiently

Reaching a live human voice when you telephone a business might seem to be a rarity these days. But the only time you'll reach a machine at West Florida Electric Cooperative's phone number is during a widespread power outage. Then WFEC's automated outage response system is by far the most efficient means available for processing a large number of outage reports.

Called a PORCHE, for "Power Outage Response Call Handling Equipment," WFEC's automated system can answer 12 telephone lines simultaneously while one or two service center attendants dispatch crews to the outage sites. An entire roomful of live operators couldn't handle the heavy volume of calls during a widespread outage as efficiently as the PORCHE can. While you're filing your outage report, the system is locating and displaying your account information, as well as your line location, the time of your call and even which transformer serves you, on the dispatcher's computer monitor.

With clear, easy-to-follow directions, the system guides you through the steps for reporting your outage and providing other details that might help speed restoration. First, the PORCHE prompts you to enter, if you have a touch tone phone, the seven-digit telephone number for the location where the problem is occurring. If you don't have a touch tone phone, you may simply remain on the line for further assistance. To ensure you don't miss any of the instructions, the system repeats them if you haven't responded within several seconds. Should you enter a phone number not listed in the Co-op's customer records, the system repeats the number for you to verify by pressing "1" if correct or "2" if incorrect.

The PORCHE's second set of instructions determines the reason for your call. If you're reporting an outage due to some unknown cause, you'll press "1." If you know the cause of the outage you're reporting, you'll press "2." If you're calling for some other reason, you'll press "3."

As soon you report an outage due to unknown causes, the PORCHE concludes its instructions with a closing message as it begins processing your report. However, if you've indicated you know the cause of the outage, the system directs you to record a voice message briefly describing the problem. When you leave a recorded message, the system alerts the dispatcher to check it.

After you complete your report, the system thanks you and reminds you to allow sufficient time for repairs before reporting your problem again. As you hang up the phone, the PORCHE is sending your report to the dispatcher so the crews can restore your power as quickly as possible.

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As restoration progresses, the PORCHE might call you back to verify the problem you reported has been resolved. After an identifying message, the system cues you to press “1” if your power has been restored, or “2” if a problem still exists. The system can then alert the dispatcher that the crews should continue working on the problem if it remains unresolved.



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