Move over Amazon; OG&E using drones for storm recovery

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OKLAHOMA CITY —OG&E is gearing up for severe storm season 2017 with plans to use drones and advanced planning to expedite storm assessment and restoration times.

“We used drones for the first time to assess damage in the Woodward area following Winter Storm Jupiter in January,” said Kathleen O’Shea, OG&E spokeswoman. “In the past, we’ve used helicopters, and we’ll still use them as necessary, however, drones can be deployed faster than helicopters in most scenarios. We estimate that we shaved off approximately a half day of assessment time by using drones.”

The company will contract drone service in storm recovery efforts but hopes to develop partnerships with local educational institutions for other applications.

“We’re discussing a number of potential uses such as inspecting power distribution lines, inspecting wind farm turbines, and inspecting the inside of power plant equipment like boilers and stacks,” O’Shea said. “Drones have become a prominent topic of interest among utility providers in Oklahoma and across the country.”

OG&E is also incorporating advanced planning to reduce duration of storm-related power outages. When major storms are predicted, the company will set up staging areas and secure extra crews a few days in advance. The tactic was employed in January and estimated to have reduced the outage duration by 50 percent.

“Every storm is different and we know that within our service territory, you don’t always get a few days’ notice of severe weather,” O’Shea said. “In the case of Jupiter, we were able to pre-stage 1,270 workers and three staging areas. And even though the storm was not as far reaching as predicted, 31,000 customers lost power. If the storm had occurred as forecasted, pre-staging resources could have reduced outage duration by 24 to 48 hours.”

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