



# WHITE CITY WATER IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

CLIENT

SANDY, UTAH  
LOCATION

## Making Every Day (and Meter) Count – Better Customer Service through Data Logging

Three months of the year, Sandy, Utah is *snowy* Utah. Located in the shadow of the mountains, this small community is home to the White City Water Improvement District, a utility serving approximately 4,100 connections.

For the last eight years, Rhonda Withers, assistant manager of the district, has been at the mercy of Rocky Mountain winters' snow and ice. For three months each year – December, January, and February – the utility could not make the rounds to read the meters. And every year, her staff dreaded when March came around. Customers who'd not given much thought to their water bills for several months were suddenly confronted with an entire season's readings to make up for the lapsed time.

Compounding this problem, according to Withers, were the galvanized service lines in many of the city's older homes. Between corroding, leaking, and poorly pressurized service lines and decades-old meters (several of them rebuilt), many residents would receive unwelcome surprises with high-water bills in the spring – indicating likely line breaks or other sources of water loss.

### Warming Up Quickly to a New System

Even after the spring thaw, the White City Water Improvement District faced an uphill battle trying to read its meters. "We had a plethora of different types and makes of equipment," said Withers.

Withers, who'd been a Neptune customer before her move to White City, decided to call on Neptune Territory Manager Tony Glassier. "Tony was phenomenal," she said. "He personally came to our board meetings to talk with the members to explain how we'd benefit from a new system."

The district's board signed on to a new plan to change out the district's meter population. Neptune Distributor Ken Sheffield of Meterworks, Inc. took charge of the project, using his own team to install the more than 4,000 E-Coder|R900i™ radio frequency endpoints with data logging capability. The installation began the first week of September 2008 and was complete by the first week of February 2009.

"I can't say enough about Ken," said Withers. "His team undertook a huge changeout, dealing with old, galvanized service lines – yet we never received one complaint call, never had a single service line break, or even a break in water service."

### Results in Hours, Year-Round

It didn't take long after the initial installations for the district to start seeing results. "The distances from the actual meters where we can capture meter readings now are amazing," Withers said. "We were worried about the radio reads, especially since they're installed in pits and the topography climbs up the sides of mountains. But it's worked wonderfully. Reads that used to take 10 to 14 days now only take an hour and 40 minutes."

Neither snow nor sleet stops those reads, either; but Withers doesn't seem to mind driving in it to collect the data with Neptune's MRX920™ mobile data collector riding shotgun. For the first time, the utility can gather accurate, timely reads year-round. And with its new data logging

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– Rhonda Withers

capabilities, the district can pinpoint leaks and other problems much earlier. Among a neighborhood of older homes, White City identified continuous leaks in excess of 30 days in 241 homes. “We’ve been able to give our customers a list of possible leak sources around their homes – such as washing machines, toilets, and sinks,” Withers said. “And when they’ve had time to identify the problem, we offer to come check and make sure it’s fixed.”

### The Proof is in the Logging

One of the first big tests of the utility’s data logging capabilities and their impact on customer service came at the end of the holidays. An irate customer kept calling the staff to rail about a high-water bill.

“We told the customer that with the new meter in the ground, their bill was absolutely accurate. But the customer was furious, so we printed out a [consumption] graph to show a continuous leak that occurred for at least 90 days. We even correctly identified when they’d gone away for Christmas and come back – when there was a huge spike on the graph. When we asked if there’d been anything unusual, the customer eventually revealed the reason.”



The “smoking gun” turned out to be a broken pipe that had flooded the customer’s basement. The customer backed down and apologized for their treatment of the district staff. “It was the first time we were able to use the data logger as proof and resolve a customer complaint,” Withers said.

(L-R:) Ryan Johnson, Operations Manager, White City Water Improvement District; Rhonda Withers, Assistant Manager, White City Water Improvement District; Ken Sheffield, Meterworks (local Neptune distributor)

### What a Difference a Month Makes

Thankfully, the vast majority of White City’s customers have been happy with the new system. In addition to being able to alert customers as soon as possible leaks occur, faster and more accurate reads mean that the district offers customers true monthly billing. “There used to be an overlap since we couldn’t read everything within the month, and customers wouldn’t understand that a ‘July’ bill included part of ‘June.’ Again, this is huge. For the first time, we can give them a timely, correct reflection of what they use.”

Customers are even asking about how the meter reading works. “They come up to our mobile unit and ask to see how the unit works,” Withers said. “They have a better idea of how our investment is improving their service, and it’s definitely a ‘buy-in.’”

White City isn’t just serving residential customers. “We’ve asked Neptune to help us change out our commercial meters too,” said Withers. Now the utility will be able to provide the same level of accuracy and efficiency to the area’s schools, parks, and malls.

“Originally,” explained Withers, “our plan was to implement our new [ARB® Utility Management System™] in stages. But our revenue increased so fast that after just three months the board decided to do everything at once.” When explaining how Neptune’s ARB Utility Management Systems have performed for her utility, she added, “This is one of those ‘textbook’ things – this is what we’ve been hoping for.”

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