

Valmont® Utility Assists OPPD with Storm Emergency Response

(OMAHA, Neb.) Watching on radar as the derecho – a widespread storm system with damaging winds – blasted toward eastern Nebraska on Dec. 15, 2021, the emergency response team at Omaha Public Power District (OPPD) braced for the worst: power outages that could cripple the metro area and beyond. Rapid assessment of power line damage would be vital. Enter Valmont Utility, a leading industry partner in creating vital infrastructure that enables the delivery of reliable power to the world.

Valmont Utility offers products and services that harden the grid against age and environmental impacts, and one key aspect of that effort is reliable, efficient drone technology. Partnering with Valmont Infrastructure Services who manages 140-plus certified unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) – or drone – pilots ready to deploy in markets throughout the nation, Valmont UAS Drone Services are critical tools for structure and line inspections. They were just the technology that OPPD would need as the powerful storm bore down on its 13-county service area in eastern Nebraska.

Just a few weeks earlier, the Valmont Utility team had presented the UAS Drone Services capabilities, including the ability to mobilize drones anywhere nationwide within an eight-hour window, to OPPD managers.

The message was well received. Keven Carroll, Valmont senior project manager of infrastructure, who coordinates the emergency UAS drone inspections, received the call from OPPD the morning of Dec. 15. By 10:30 a.m., Valmont Infrastructure Services had a Master Service Agreement in place, and an alert went out to local drone pilots, advising them of the need for rapid deployment after the storm that night.

“We quickly became a seamless extension of OPPD during this severe storm emergency,” said Carroll.

By 11 p.m. on Dec. 15, after the derecho had blown through eastern Nebraska and western Iowa, leaving thousands without power, two drone pilots first deployed to the Nebraska City area, 44 miles south of Omaha, to assess immediate damage to OPPD transmission and distribution lines. Over the course of three days, additional drone pilot teams mobilized to inspect the lines, while others prepped equipment for the following days’ flights.

“During those critical three days, we were able to inspect nearly 160 miles of distribution lines on six line segments,” said Carroll. The crews identified and reported nine different structural issues on two segments that required repairs or additional OPPD inspections. The Valmont drone team was prepared to inspect the Cooper Nuclear Station in Brownville, Neb., but by day three, OPPD was able to do the final inspection of their lines, Carroll added.

OPPD was extremely pleased with the technology partnership. “The Valmont drone team’s ability to mobilize during a storm and then ‘get eyes on the lines’ even as the storm was passing was a huge advantage,” **said David Spargo, OPPD manager of asset management & maintenance.** “Having drones in the field within eight hours meant that we could get crews to the right spot and make repairs that much faster.”

As many as 24,000 OPPD customers were without power in the peak aftermath of the storm, which spawned tornadoes and major flooding, but OPPD was able to restore all services within 96 hours.

Not only can drones be deployed more rapidly than helicopters used by lineworkers to conduct inspections, the service is also far less expensive. Drone services cost around \$1,400 a day for two drone pilots to perform independent flight and full inspection results, while a helicopter and pilot can cost \$10,000 per day and take three or more days to mobilize.

Valmont UAS Drone Services has partnered with a number of other utility companies across the nation to quickly and safely inspect power lines and other structures. The drones are equipped with high-definition imagery and/or thermal imaging technology that can capture an abundance of real-time data. Valmont Infrastructure Services also operates a national UAS pilot certification program titled ASCEND.

Valmont Industries Inc., which for 75 years has been a global leader in creating vital infrastructure and advancing agricultural productivity, formed Valmont Utility nearly five decades ago to be a reliable partner for utility companies. Today we remain committed to doing more with less by innovating through technology. Our UAS Drone Services are an extension of this commitment.

About Valmont Utility

Valmont® Utility is a leading industry partner in creating vital infrastructure that enables the delivery of reliable power to the world. Our variety of products and services, engineering and technology expertise, and custom solutions harden the grid against age and environmental impacts while making renewable energy sources possible. Valmont is a global leader in creating vital infrastructure and advancing agricultural productivity, improving life around the world. Learn more about Valmont Utility at valmontutility.com and Valmont at Valmont.com.

Contact: *In advance of event for details and interview times.*

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