

Rebuilding the Power Grid

During the early morning of September 24th, Hurricane Rita, a major category 4 storm, came ashore along the Texas-Louisiana coast. It brought powerful winds, heavy rain and destruction unseen in this area for over 30 years. Most of the hardest hit areas get their power from two companies: Beaumont based Entergy in the larger cities and Sam Houston Electric Cooperative in many of the rural areas.



“Rita largely destroyed Entergy's giant transmission lines, which carry electricity from Beaumont to Lafayette, La.,” said Terry Hadley at the Texas Public Utility Commission. It ruined thousands of utility towers, wire spans and transformers.



Orange, Texas emergency management coordinator, Ken Kreger, said power is the biggest need. Utility companies brought crews in from all over the country and scrambled to bring 800,000 customers back on line Saturday after Hurricane Rita added to the headaches the companies have been battling since Hurricane Katrina. Rita left more than 600,000 people without power after her strongest side raked Louisiana's coast and then moved up through the state. Another 200,000 were still dark from Hurricane Katrina. "Rita was devastating to the state, especially just coming off Katrina," said Chanel Lagarde, spokesman for Entergy, the state's largest supplier of electricity, with 1.2 million customers. Entergy's transmission system had extensive damage, with approximately 62 transmission lines and 11 substations taken out of service. Hurricane Rita, at its peak, took 82 percent of Entergy's Texas transmission lines and 38 percent of the transmission lines in southwest Louisiana out of service, including all of the lines west of Lafayette. In total, 343 transmission lines and 436 substations were out of service. The total mileage of lines out at peak was approximately 3,803.

Repair of such overwhelming damage would take a coordinated effort. An established strong working relationship between pole manufacturer, Thomas & Betts Corporation and North American Galvanizing Company made the amazing speed at which damaged utility poles were replaced possible.

“As the storm approached, the safety of our Houston facility employees and their

families became the primary concern” said Ron Evans, President of North American Galvanizing Company. “On Thursday, before the storm, the Fairbanks plant was shut down and evacuated. Part of this shutdown procedure included developing contingency plans for the plant restart.”

In the hours leading up to the shutdown, constant communication between North American Galvanizing Company and its partner, Thomas and Betts became critical. By working together at every level, both companies planned and executed a schedule to evacuate their facilities, and coordinated a production start up plan for after the storm. The partnership that was established between North American Galvanizing Company, and Thomas and Betts and Entergy more than five years ago provided a situation where no time was lost between start up and production at either facility.



The ongoing relationship between North American Galvanizing Company and its partners such as Thomas and Betts also resulted in positive effects for other accounts that were supporting the hurricane relief efforts as well.

“The inherent efficiencies brought about by our close working relationship also has a positive secondary effect on all of our customers.” said Evans.



Thomas and Betts and North American Galvanizing both agree that it is when conditions are at their worst, either from the effect of weather or business related, that the long standing relationship between the two companies pays the highest dividend. In this case, a strong business relationship between partners resulted in the storm affected public benefiting the greatest.



Entergy had restored power to 95 percent or more of the customers who lost power at Rita's peak within three weeks of the storm.