

NEWS RELEASE
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Coping under pressure: Ergon rebuilds after Cyclone Larry

29th May 2006, Brisbane, Australia - When Cyclone Larry slammed into North Queensland in March, the job of rebuilding the area began as soon as the winds dropped. The massive storm cut a swath through the area, flattening buildings and wrecking essential infrastructure, including power and communications links.

For regional electricity distributor Ergon Energy, the rebuilding job was massive. Damaged power poles and fallen lines meant more than 130,000 customers were without service. When the 400-strong field team had completed most of the repair work, a second job began.



Larry's calling card:

The cyclone left more than 130,000 users without power

Source: The Australian, Ian Grayson, May 2, 2006

All new poles and equipment had to be checked and added to the company's central asset management register, which keeps track of all field equipment for maintenance purposes. Ergon Energy network maintenance and standards manager Ken Ash said the company's team of field inspectors had to compare the details in the register with what existed on the ground. "When your priority is restoring supply as quickly as possible, keeping a detailed record of all the changes can fall by the wayside," he said.

Using a mobile field asset management system, inspectors combed the area, checking database details with what was in place. Armed with Hewlett-Packard iPAQ handheld devices, the staff checked each pole to ensure it was in good condition and properly logged.

"The system links the handheld devices with our central applications such as SAP, Mincom Ellipse and our mapping application," he said. "Information is displayed as maps showing where each pole and piece of equipment is located. When an inspector clicks on a pole, it opens a series of forms containing information to be checked or updated."

"Each handheld can create defect notices and has a calculation routine that assesses a range of subjective and objective factors to determine whether a pole is fit for service," he said.

The Field Mobile Computing system, as it is called, was built by Australian integrator Geomatic Technologies. GT managing director Adrian Lewis said the system uses Sybase Afaia software to manage data movement between the central applications and the handheld devices.

"Afaia manages the transfer of data and maps to and from the mobile personal digital assistants," he said. "Work is completed offline, with the inspectors connecting when they can."

Because of the remote areas where many inspectors work, connection between the handhelds and the central applications is usually over dial-in connections on fixed lines. "This makes the system different from others of this type, which rely on mobile networks to function," he said. "Where these guys are working, there might not be a mobile base station anywhere to be seen."

Each inspector can download work schedules and upload completed reports. In very remote areas, such synchronisation may only take place once a week.

About ERGON

Ergon Energy is committed to delivering sustainable quality energy solutions. This commitment is part of its vision to be recognised as 'a world-class, customer-driven energy business. With an asset base of \$3.8 billion, and over 3,000 employees, Ergon delivers from the Torres Strait to Queensland's major regional centres and from the coast to the outback - an area over six times the size of Victoria.

Queensland Government owned, the Ergon Energy group includes Ergon Energy Corporation Limited - our regulated electricity distribution business, and Ergon Energy Pty Ltd - our energy retailing business as our main subsidiary.

In addition to its commitment to around 600,000 customers within Ergon Energy's franchise footprint, Ergon is one of Australia's leading electricity retailers to large contestable customers in the National Electricity Market.

About Geomatic Technologies

Geomatic Technologies Pty Ltd is a leader in the provision of spatially based business solutions, information products and services including photogrammetry, linear asset mapping and field workforce solutions. The company has completed asset mapping projects for power utilities in Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia.

For more information on Geomatic Technologies Pty Ltd, please contact the company on +61 3 9694 4244, e-mail info@geomatic.com.au or visit www.geomatic.com.au