



A playbook for efficiency

Cooperating to meet new dispatching needs

By Kathi Risch

Tony Skonhovd, operations & maintenance supervisor, trains Angie Misek, distributed generation/service dispatcher, on procedures for the Groton Generation Station.

With Basin Electric both expanding generation to meet member needs and trying to keep costs in check, the cooperative is digging deep into its playbook for innovative ways to increase efficiencies. A new central dispatch center for distributed generation is one way the cooperative is streamlining operations through creative cooperation.



Kevin Tschosik

Kevin Tschosik manages Basin Electric's distributed generation, which is located near loads and designed to supplement or replace power

produced by larger baseload resources. He says the way distributed generation has been growing, management decided all of it should be managed and dispatched from one place.

Basin Electric employees had been remotely operating existing distributed generation, including the Groton Generation Station and Spirit Mound Station, both in South Dakota, out of Leland Olds Station in North Dakota, and the Wyoming Distributed Generation out of Antelope Valley Station, also in North Dakota.

Tschosik, former operations supervisor at Leland Olds, started in the newly created position as manager of distributed generation about a year ago. He is responsible for the operation, maintenance and dispatch of all Basin Electric's distributed or remotely operated generation. He's also responsible for setting up the new dispatch center.

Tschosik says the seed was planted for the joint dispatch center long before he came on the scene at Headquarters, but ultimately, the upcoming operation of the PrairieWinds projects and the Culbertson Generation Station drove the decision forward.

The next question was: "Where do you put it?" Since Basin Electric already had a 24-hour dispatch center for its Security and Response Services (SRS), that was a logical place to consider.

Former vice president of plant operations, Bob Holzworth, and Paul Sukut, senior vice president and deputy general manager, had discussed the possibility of sharing space and employees. And even before that, Ron Rebenitsch, manager of alternative technologies, brought up the concept to Chris Baumgartner, manager of member relations, whose group includes SRS. SRS is supervised by Darren Stastny.



Chris Baumgartner

Baumgartner says, "We (dispatch) have been monitoring the wind turbines at Minot (ND) and Chamberlain (SD) for five or six years. Ron had mentioned to us, 'If we grow the

wind projects at some point, would you be able to do more work for us?' So the idea was out there."

As Basin Electric added more distributed generation, Holzworth wanted to coordinate it more effectively by bringing that function to Bismarck. "I brought him to the dispatch center and showed him what we do and he said, 'This will work,'" Baumgartner says.

SRS offers a range of alarm monitoring (fire, police, personal medical pendant and environmental) and dispatch services (line crew, power outage) to distribution electric cooperatives and their residential and commercial customers. Currently, 53 cooperatives purchase these services, and SRS personnel are responsible for dispatching and tracking more than 800 line workers. SRS also provides various security functions for Basin Electric facilities and its construction sites.

"All of these functions have continued to expand, so that's why when Kevin and Bob came to us, I just thought it was an extension of what we were doing," Baumgartner says.

Tschosik says as he learned more, it became apparent SRS could help. "Chris and Darren and I sat down and talked about a lot of scenarios and how we could accommodate each other. . . . Darren and Chris were all in," Tschosik says.

Several dispatchers were part-timers, so Tschosik thought by working together, more employees who wanted full-time positions could be offered them. Tschosik hired three people for the distributed generation area and trained six additional dispatchers for backup. The distributed generation side will also back up SRS when they are bombarded with calls during ice storms, for example.

The dispatch center solution dovetails with a recent staffing directive from Basin Electric CEO Ron Harper, aimed at containing costs. Harper placed a hiring freeze on all areas of Basin Electric and its subsidiaries except at new facilities staffing up for operation. He asked management, among other things, to evaluate combining or realignment of responsibilities of staff.

The new distributed generation service dispatchers are Melissa Wittenberg, Angie Misek and Shawn Meissel. Tom Radenz, SRS coordinator, who is responsible for scheduling both areas, says dispatchers who will back up the distributed generation are Merrill Hirschert, Patty Kluge, Casey Berger, Jeff Dietrich, Allison Evenenko and Dorothy Duhr. Randy Brewster, lead service dispatcher, will also assist in scheduling staff.

The rest of the staff in SRS who also make the new arrangement possible include full-time employees Norma Geiger, DesaRae Hogan, Diane Nieuwsma, Diane Rambousek, Caryn Thompson, Sonya Wanner, Rhonda Fritts, Michael Roberdeau, Randy Schramm, Rory Van Wyk,

Lee Webb, Gene Giesen; and part-time employees: Maran Hopfauf, Michael Horner, Kari Johnson, Rochelle Kocher, Linda Schuler, Ashley Shufesky, Larry Toman and Scott Zuther.

Two of the distributed generation dispatchers divide the 4 a.m. to 4 p.m. shift Monday through Sunday. The third person works 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday to help through the evening peak. The other six fill in from 6 p.m. to 4 a.m. Monday through Friday and from 4 p.m. to 4 a.m. on weekends and holidays, but can still take SRS calls.

"They don't have to know how a gas turbine works," Tschosik says. "We just train them to follow the procedures."

Procedures have been developed for the dispatchers for the wind projects also, so if an alarm comes in, the procedures tell them exactly what they have to do.

"It may tell them to reset a turbine, restart a turbine, or call out a technician. It's a cheat sheet basically," Tschosik says. "There are 380 alarms on each wind turbine, so there are quite a few sensors out there. The other sites, except for the Wyoming Distributed Generation, are always manned in the daytime, so it would just be at night that if we were called to run, we initiate operation. Then if we get an alarm, we may have to call the local technician responsible for that resource."

Tschosik says the dispatch area on the third floor north wing of the Basin Electric Headquarters building was remodeled for the additional distributed generation duties last summer. The two areas are separated by a door, which will normally stay open unless one area gets noisy due to a large volume of calls.

"We shared our space and made that work," Baumgartner says. "The real savings is in people. If Kevin were to do this completely on his own and staff it 24 hours a day, he would need a minimum of five people without anyone ever taking a vacation or calling in sick."

Tschosik says he wanted to use existing employees and train them to perform the duties needed. "They were already accustomed to dispatching in their current jobs. It seemed like the right thing to do. Chris and Darren are really good to work with; the same

with Paul. I sit down with those guys and everybody wants to make it work."

"What we really have

are shared Basin Electric employees who can work on both sides," Baumgartner says. "And by doing that, we are using our resources more effectively between the two centers. . . . (Kevin's) saving two to three people, and we're saving one part-time."

"It (the process) made us take a look at ourselves about how we could do things better, smarter and easier," Stastny says.

The new distributed generation dispatch center was manned full-time starting Dec. 11, 2009, when the first of the 80 PrairieWinds ND 1, turbines, south of Minot, ND, were commissioned.

Tschosik and Baumgartner agree it's too early in the life of the new distributed generation dispatch center to declare success, but through experience and time, both expect it to run smoothly. "Even if we have to add a person, we're still saving," Baumgartner says.

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Darren Stastny, Basin Electric