



Simulator Helps Co-ops Drive Safer

By Derrill Holly | ECT Staff Writer Published: December 21st, 2015

Electric cooperatives in Louisiana are using a driving simulator to help reduce the risks of accidents by keeping the focus on safety. Kenneth Bailey, a journeyman lineworker from DEMCO, uses the simulator's text messaging reaction feature.

"Driver distraction is at an all-time high in utility vehicles," said Mike Bergeaux, director of loss control at the [Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives](#). "We have two-way radios, laptop computers and nearly every driver has a cell phone."

Kenneth Bailey, a journeyman lineworker from DEMCO, uses the simulator's text messaging reaction feature. (Photo By: DEMCO)

While defensive driver training sessions and safety meeting discussions raised general awareness, Bergeaux wanted tangible results, so he kept looking for promising technology. A demonstration of the Virtual Driver Interactive simulator at the NRECA Safety Summit in April caught his attention.

El Dorado, Calif.-based VDI offers several simulator designs, including models that can be easily stored in a case and shipped to various training locations. The statewide association spent about \$15,000 on a unit to share among eight Louisiana distribution co-ops. The computer interface and screen connect to a dashboard with steering wheel and mock brake and accelerator pedals.

Safety and loss mitigation managers can request the unit and keep it until anyone who regularly uses a digger-derrick, crew truck, bucket truck or any other on-road vehicle has a chance to take one of several training programs designed to reduce both at fault and not at fault vehicle accidents.

"There's a texting and driving component that has the operator actually text on their phone while they are using the simulator," Bergeaux said. "It throws a lot of curves and distractions at the driver and reinforces the need to stay alert."

With many co-op personnel spending three to five hours each day behind the wheel, cutting the risks of traffic accidents could pay big safety dividends. Time on the simulator is also an eye-opener.

"It's really made me change my mind about texting and driving," said Kenneth Bailey, a journeyman lineworker for Baton Rouge-based [Dixie Electric Membership Corp.](#) "I didn't think my phone was that much of a distraction, but I do now."

About 300 Louisiana co-op employees were expected to take the simulator training within the first year. The statewide association's safety and loss control staff is tracking the results.