

# So, There's A Blizzard And The Lights Are Out

*A Colorado company is ready to help utilities in snow country reduce outage times during harsh weather.*

In the midst of a major winter storm, a power line on a remote mountainside goes down. It's time to get the snowcat out that's been sitting idle since last winter and call out a repair crew. It takes a couple of hours to round up the crew and get the snowcat loaded on the flatbed. A few more hours are needed to drive to the end of the road closest to the site. A flat tire on the trailer costs almost an hour. The snowcat is unloaded and the crew climbs aboard.

About an hour later you get a cellular call from the lineworker who doubles as a

snowcat driver. He is stuck after sliding off the side of the narrow site access road. You ask when he thinks he will get it unstuck. He mumbles. Spring. Meanwhile, customers are without power when they might need it most.

Snow Transport Specialists of Littleton, Colo., has introduced a service to eliminate scenarios like the one described above. Starting this November, the company will position snowcats, trucks and trailers to transport them and highly experienced operators to locations throughout North America. The goal is to have a snow vehicle

and operator stationed within 100 miles of each location where the company has a contract.

Art Seely, president and CEO of the company, says a truck carrying a snowcat will be dispatched promptly and will arrive at the site to transport the repair crew within two to three hours. Transport trucks are heavy-duty, four-wheel-drive flatbeds, not the typical pickup or sport utility vehicle. The same blizzard on the mountainside is also undoubtedly causing havoc on the highways.

Utilities, cellular communication companies and others with remote facilities can contract for on-call





snow transport service on an annual retainer basis with an hourly fee charged only when the service is used. This beats making a large investment for a piece of equipment that is used only a few times a year. Such equipment entails not only a capital investment, but also operational, maintenance, insurance, depreciation and training expenses.

Snow vehicle problems usually occur not because of the quality of the equipment used, but often because of its infrequent usage. Operators never get enough experience to become truly proficient and confident with the snow vehicle. A utility snow vehicle operator may get only two to four hours of driving experience annually in conjunction with his normal duties as a technician or lineworker. At Snow Transport Specialists, operators will log 200 to 400 hours of driving time. That is their primary job.

Snow vehicles used by Snow Transport Specialists are the newest and best designs available and are specifically suited to the terrain, snow conditions and challenges of

each site. Their equipment can reach sites quickly under the worst weather conditions. While a typical snow vehicle may be able to travel at a speed of two to four mph in deep snow, Snow Transport Specialists' high-performance vehicles can travel at 12 to 16 mph in the same snow. This means reduced travel and power outage time as well as reduced overtime for repair crews. Finally, Snow Transport Specialists equips its vehicles with advanced technology equipment like satellite communications gear, GPS (global positioning systems) navigation capability and more that is not usually found on owner-operated vehicles.

Snow Transport Specialists is part of the newly incorporated Snow Operations Training Center, which also includes the Snow Survival School. For the past 10 years Art Seely has operated the one-of-a-kind Snow Survival School, providing intensive instruction and

hands-on experience throughout North America, Europe and Asia in extreme climate survival, emergency snowcat repair and extrication, medical care, signaling for help, avalanche procedures, navigation and much more. All operators for Snow Transport Specialists are graduates of the school, some are instructors. They can keep repair crews out of trouble in the worst weather.

■ William D. Siuru Jr.

