

The Right Decisions When Lives are On the Line

A Massive Ice Storm. How One Utility Made the Right Decisions.

Electricity is the lifeblood of modern society and commerce. When a prolonged power outage occurs in winter, people can die of exposure, carbon monoxide poisoning (poorly ventilated heaters), and electric shock ("do it yourself" installation of portable generators). The utility industry is acutely aware of the critical threat posed by major ice storms. This is the story of how one utility moved proactively to save lives with the aid of accurate, specific weather forecasts.

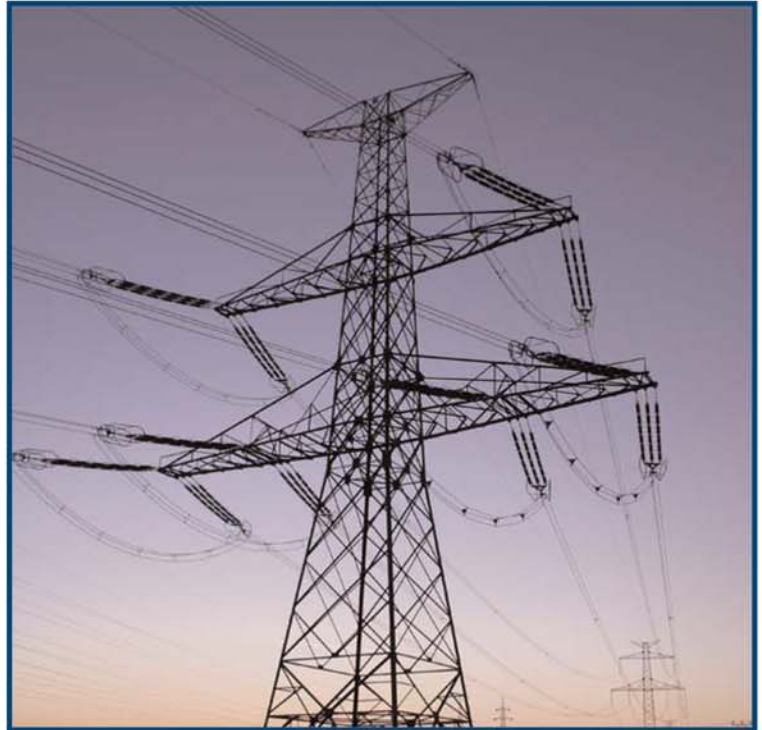
The story starts Monday, January 25, 2010. Government forecasts for Wichita, Kansas, the regional headquarters of Westar Energy, called for "light freezing rain" beginning Wednesday night. The AccuWeather forecast for Wichita called for snow only.

This is a critical difference for an electric utility. Glaze ice from even light freezing rain can cause power fluctuations and failures. However, while AccuWeather forecasted only snow in Wichita and Kansas, the severe weather experts forecasted significant freezing rain to the south in Oklahoma.

Westar Energy took note of the differing forecasts and began a series of consultations with our meteorologists. Phil Sadler, Westar's Director, Distribution System Operations, later explained, "We were nervous about the differing forecasts but [AccuWeather's] Andrew Gagnon was a great help and kept us feeling good about the forecast and our plans." Based on the AccuWeather forecast, Westar's restoration crews would not be needed in Kansas and would be available to help people in Oklahoma.

Forecasts were unchanged Tuesday morning: the government was still forecasting "light freezing rain" for Wichita while AccuWeather continued to forecast only snow. AccuWeather continued to forecast ice storm conditions in Oklahoma with up to $\frac{3}{4}$ " accumulations which would result in major power failures.

Tuesday afternoon at 3pm, we increased our forecast for freezing rain in Oklahoma to call for as much as one inch of glaze ice. This would cause damage to the electrical distribution system itself and likely cause the loss of power for days.



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That type of disaster inevitably overwhelms the resources of any single electric utility. Typically, help is summoned after the power fails. But, armed with a forecast of snow only, Westar knew that the crews would not be needed in Kansas. So, Westar made the decision to send its crews to Oklahoma more than 24 hours before the storm began.

The crews hit the road Thursday morning, which allowed them to travel on safe highways. The plan worked perfectly, as the crews arrived just as the freezing rain began to fall. Sadler said that they watched the freezing rain "charge north in Oklahoma all day" but it stopped "right at the Kansas border" just as it was forecast to do.

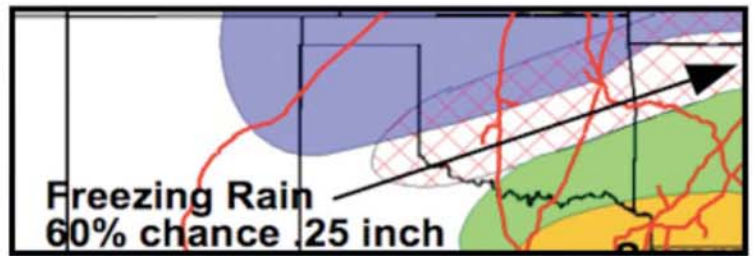
At the height of the storm, more than 500,000 Oklahomans were without electrical power. As of Saturday afternoon, the number had been cut to 126,000, thanks to the quick work of both Oklahoma and out-of-state crews.

The damage was so severe that on Monday, February 8, more than 7,000 homes and businesses were still without power. Westar's crews remained on the scene to rebuild the hundreds of poles that were snapped by the weight of the ice so that power could be restored.

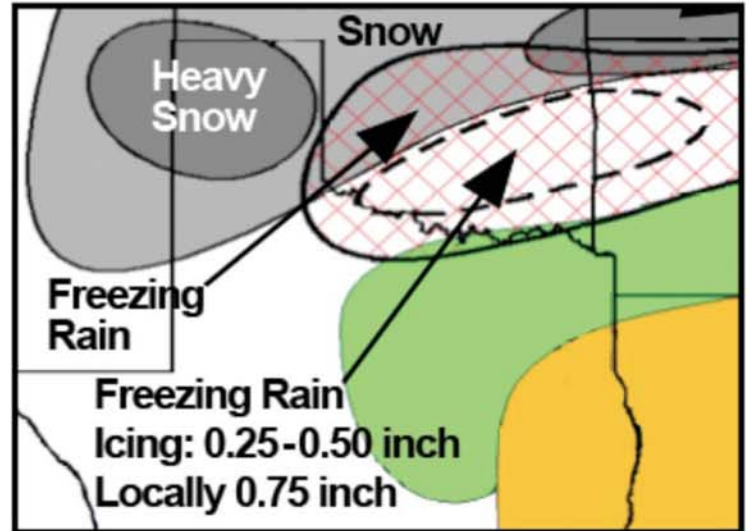
Phil Sadler says of AccuWeather's forecast, "You did a great job." Not only were the AccuWeather forecasts for Oklahoma's ice accurate, Wichita's snowfall of 5 inches was right on the money.

AccuWeather's forecasts are a business management tool that enabled Westar and the citizens of Oklahoma to benefit from smart decision-making.

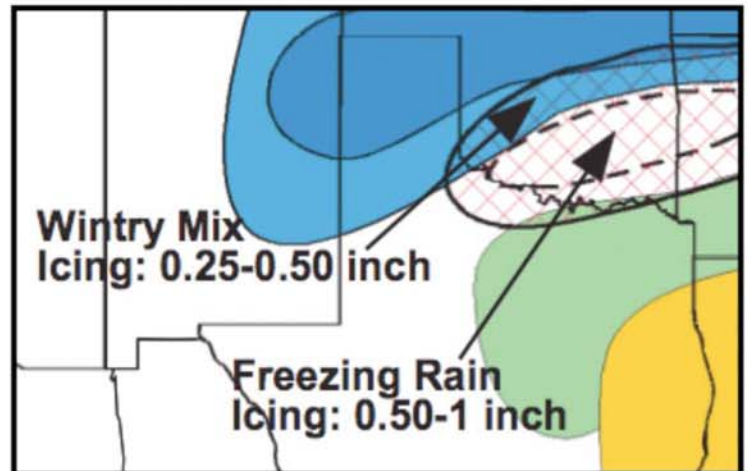
Call us today and we'll explain how our services help you build profits and minimize losses for your business.



AccuWeather Forecast for Ice in Oklahoma, 5pm January 25, 2010.



AccuWeather Forecast for Ice in Oklahoma, 7am January 26, 2010.



AccuWeather Forecast for Ice in Oklahoma, 3pm January 26, 2010.

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