

# Indiana Gas communication goes high-tech

■ Data transmission through cellular system is expected to reduce paper work, wasted time.

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**A**s a service specialist with Indiana Gas, Danny Cline spends a lot of his time doing paper work.

Starting this week, that should change.

The reason is a relatively new method of wireless data transmission that Indiana Gas Co., Cellular One of Central Indiana and International Business Machines Corp. are testing in central Indiana.

It's called CDPD, which stands for cellular digital packet data. And it makes wireless data transmission much cheaper and more reliable.

"We're taking a whole group of services that were pretty much tied to land-line (phone) service and now we're moving that to the airwaves," said Ted Baker, major accounts and data service manager for Cellular One.

Here's how it will affect Cline: Traditionally, he and other Indiana Gas service people begin their day by reporting to a service center. There, they receive paper work orders that tell them where to go and what to do. As they perform the tasks, customers sign the work orders, indicating the jobs were completed. At the end of the day, the service people take the completed work orders back to the service centers.

"Ninety percent of the job is paper work," Cline said.

While CDPD is being tested, about 20 Indiana Gas service people, including Cline, will carry laptop computers with electronic pens.

Instead of picking up work orders at the office in the morning, the service people will have them downloaded into their computers. As they perform the jobs, they will enter information about them into the computers with the electronic pens. The customers will even use the pens and computers to sign off on the jobs.

Using the CDPD technology, the computers will transfer the information back to Indiana Gas' mainframes throughout the day.

In addition to reducing paper work, the system should allow Indiana Gas to let customers know more accurately when a service person is heading for their home or business, since the employees will be on-line most of the time.

"I think we'll be able to get to the customer faster," Cline said.

Indiana Gas' portable computer system would have been possible with traditional cellular transmission. But it would have been less reliable and prohibitively expensive.

The reason is the amount of information



ON-LINE: Indiana Gas service specialist Danny Cline demonstrates how he thinks he'll work with the new system.

transmitted. United Parcel Service drivers have devices that communicate with the company's computer system, but they are relatively simple compared to what the Indiana Gas service people use.

CDPD technology has been in the labs for some time, but it is just being rolled out in cellular systems now. Bell Atlantic Mobile began testing it in the Philadelphia and northern New Jersey markets in September.

Jeff Martin, the area general manager for GTE Mobiline, the other cellular provider in central Indiana, said his company has it available in some West Coast markets.

"We just haven't gotten to Indiana yet," he said.

Every cellular system likely will have to

embrace the technology or another that accomplishes the same thing. Martin said the cellular industry estimates that between 40 and 50 percent of cellular traffic will be data by the next century.

Paul Sylvester, telecommunications director for Indiana Gas, said his company approached Cellular One of Central Indiana, which is owned by Bell South, roughly two years ago about testing the technology.

Cellular One said great.

"We had wanted to test CDPD and we wanted . . . to have a customer who will use it and make it part of the business," Baker said.

IBM had been working on software for a CDPD system, so it joined in the trial, too.

Sylvester said the trial will last approximately six months, at which point his company and Cellular One will evaluate it.

"If it's as successful as we think it's going to be," he said, "we're going to roll it out in the next 12 to 16 months."

Sylvester foresees big things for CDPD technology.

"Anyone who services customers or makes sales away from the desk will need to embrace this technology to remain competitive," he said. "The PC (personal computer), the fax, e-mail and the phone will be able to go anywhere and profits will shift in the favor of those who use this technology to get out in front of the customer."

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