

## **MWA phone system damaged due to lightning from severe thunderstorm**

### ***Basic service back online, but overall system and call center still not fully functional***

The Macon Water Authority (MWA) suffered severe damage to its telephone and telecommunications system late Monday (July 12) as a result of lightning strikes from a thunderstorm that afternoon. Initially, this severe weather impacted the main phone system of the Authority, including the call center at Authority headquarters and phone service at outlying facilities.

“Our phone system was hit by lightning, and it knocked out service just after the close of business that day (Monday, July 12),” says Kirk Nylund, director of customer service for the MWA. “The strike was at the Albert Billingslea headquarters building on Second Street, but it affected all of our phones throughout the system.”

The MWA responded by contacting vendors that provide phone service and maintain the internal infrastructure for the phone system. These vendors were contacted first thing Tuesday morning (July 13), after the cause of the outage was identified. Maintenance crews from AT&T - the primary telephone service provider for the MWA - arrived late that afternoon (July 13) to investigate and correct the issues at the headquarters building, in attempt to re-establish a dial tone for the MWA main phone line. Technicians from AT&T returned Wednesday morning (July 14) to confirm and complete the work on their equipment.

In addition, the Authority’s vendor responsible for the interior infrastructure of the utility’s phone system then began analyzing the incident and ordered replacement parts for damaged equipment, which were sent overnight for immediate installation. (Those parts were not in stock due to the age of the MWA telephone system, which is more than 15 years old.) After parts for the Authority’s interior telecommunications infrastructure arrived on Thursday morning (July 15), maintenance crews from this vendor arrived to begin installation.

However, when trying to restore the interior infrastructure of the MWA phone system, the vendor discovered additional problems, which they are continuing to address.

As of the end of the week (Friday, July 16), the MWA has limited call center service for customers dialing the main line at 478-464-5600, so customers don’t have to direct dial extensions, which can be accessed by typing 5008, 5010, 5006, 5001, 5009, or 5032, when prompted. In addition, after hours or night phone service was expected to be working again by Friday evening (July 16).

“We do not have an estimate at this time as to when we will have the full capabilities of our call center back online,” says Nylund. “But we are working continuously to get the immediate issues resolved. We assure our customers that we will have our existing telephone and telecommunications system fully functional as soon as possible, and we apologize for any inconvenience this incident may have caused and ask for patience while we restore complete phone services.”

This incident is somewhat ironic since the Macon Water Authority is in the process of upgrading its telecommunications infrastructure, system, and service. The MWA Board of Directors has allocated funds for phone system improvements, which are scheduled for installation over the next year, to minimize or avoid phone service interruptions from incidents like this in the future.

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