

Raising the bar on safety



When Dillon was awarded a contract to conduct environmental impact studies for a Northern Ontario power line, management saw an opportunity to step up their safety culture.

Terrestrial lead and health and safety coordinator for the project, Dan Bourassa explains, “Survey teams would be dispersed across 400 linear kilometers of Northern Ontario wilderness. Once off the highway, it’s all greenfield and the worksite can only be accessed by helicopter, logging road or trail.” Dillon had never taken on such a large project in that type of environment before, and the safety of their personnel was a top priority. With mere weeks before field work was due to commence, this raised new safety concerns.

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Risky Business

The project team identified a number of potential risks. For much of the field work day Dillon’s field biologists would have no available radio, cellular or landline communications. “If their UTV got stuck or broke down, or if they were ill or injured, it could take hours to reach them or a several kilometer walk out,” explains Dan. Furthermore, the worksite was in a region subject to rapid changes in weather. Hazards like lightning could require employees to seek shelter or leave the area immediately.

Having used both satellite phones and a client’s radio network in the past, Dillon knew their limitations. In addition to frequent call drops, satellite phones were

both costly and impractical for dispatching changes or pull out orders. Client controlled radio networks offered limited coverage and no location awareness.

Finding a Solution

Dillon determined that the Garmin inReach SE would best address their duty of care and the safeguard of their employees. Because inReach provided complete global coverage, employees could send and receive text messages from anywhere in the world. The SOS button would enable them to send an alert with GPS coordinates included, and receive confirmation that help was being dispatched. In combination with the Enterprise web app, the inReach solution would also make it easier for supervisors to monitor their safety via any web browser.

“We chose inReach because it enabled us to address our check-in and SOS monitoring concerns for the project, along with industry best practices for safety,” explains Dan. Because Dillon can check on the status of employees anywhere and ensure that they can obtain assistance if needed, inReach will also enable them to address even the most rigorous Provincial Work Alone laws in Canada as new projects emerge.

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Transforming Safety at Dillon

Dillon equipped their field biologists with inReach devices, and powered RAM mounts for their vehicles to charge the devices while enroute to the worksite. Because of the assessed risks, Dillon also implemented an 'always on' safety protocol for the project.

Field personnel are instructed to leave their inReach devices on continuously when away from camp, and use pre-set messages to check-in with Dan three times daily.

"The inReach devices performed really well. It only took half an hour to train staff and we never have to worry about battery life during the long days in-field," says Dan. The simple form factor and intuitive cellular-like interface made them a hit with even the least smartphone-savvy users.

"Using inReach is like having eyes-on-the-ground," exclaims Dan. "With sat phones and radios I felt like we were working blind." Now, if someone forgets to check-in Dan uses the Enterprise web app to see where they are, verify that they are going about their expected activities, and that there's likely no cause for concern. Instead of automatically hitting the panic button, Dan can send them a check-in reminder and monitor for their reply.

Employees have even started using them on their days off. "Many of our staff like to explore the wilderness on their days off," explains Dan. "They value the peace of mind that inReach gives them so much, that they've started using it to relay their trip plans with me and check in when they get back."

With inReach Dillon has been able to transform how health and safety is managed. "In the past, it was daunting to manage even a few crews. Now I can use my browser to see where everyone is, and I have more immediate insight from the field than ever," says Dan. "With all that information at my fingertips I can expand the number of projects that I can take on."

Improving Operations

In addition to safety, inReach is having positive operational impacts too. "Because inReach provides us with real-time information on the location of our teams, we can instantly dispatch resources to where they are required, and be more responsive to the changing needs of our clients," explains Dan.

Personnel use inReach to update management on weather related delays and coordinate their activities. "It isn't uncommon for UTVs to get stuck or break down deep in the bush. Now they can message the person nearest to them to come and assist, minimizing delays to the project," explains Dan. "We're able to make more informed decisions, and operate more safely and efficiently than ever."

The bottom line is that employees think the inReach devices are cool. They feel more confident going about their activities at these remote sites.

Counting Benefits

"Although we'd never put a price on safety, the affordability and flexibility of the inReach solution offers Dillon an incredible advantage as a project-based operator," explains associate John Fairs. "The low price of the device allows us to equip the entire team, and the affordable monthly subscriptions can be changed or suspended whenever we want. It fits perfectly with the seasonal and project-oriented nature of our firm's activities."

"The bottom line is that employees think the inReach devices are cool. They feel more confident going about their activities at these remote sites," explains Dan. It's good for morale and sends a clear message to everyone that Dillon cares about the health and safety of their people.