

TOP NEWS

April 15, 2011

Wixom Using Bluetooth Solution for Hands-Free Communications



The City of Wixom is using a Bluetooth solution in 12 of its vehicles to improve communication.

WIXOM, MI – The City of Wixom’s Department of Public Works is using a low-cost cell-phone-based communications solution to improve driver efficiency in the City’s small fleet.

City employees had been using their cell phones for regular communication outside of City vehicles. To enable better communication between himself, the City’s fleet manager, and City employees in the field, the City’s Public Works Director Mike Howell wanted a solution that would enable drivers to use their cell phones in a safe manner while operating a City vehicle.

“Over the last couple of years when they talked about switching frequencies for the digital radios, there is an expense with that.” Howell said. “Because of the number of vehicles we have, it would be quite an expense. We’ve been looking for several years for a way to use cell phones in the vehicles in a safe manner.”

The City tested a Bluetooth solution from a company called Got2bWireless on a small number of vehicles, which met the City’s needs and reduced costs. From there, Howell decided to roll out the solution across the City’s fleet of 12 vehicles. The City operates five Sterling dump trucks and seven Ford pickup trucks.

The solution from Got2bWireless is a Bluetooth device that integrates with the vehicle’s radio system. Instead of using more expensive digital radios, this Bluetooth solution pairs with the cell phones used by operators of City vehicles. Using digital signal processing (DSP) noise cancellation technology, the device allows drivers to hear the phone ring while operating a dump truck or pickup.



The small device on the right is the control for the Bluetooth device.

Howell said whereas the usual digital radios cost several thousand dollars per vehicle, the Bluetooth solution costs about \$75 per unit, according to Got2bWireless, and \$150-\$200 with installation included. Even with the installation costs included, the solution offers significant savings. Installation involved dropping the vehicles off at a local company in the evening and picking them up the next morning.

Howell found out about this solution when the assistant city manager approached him about it.

“Through conversations through a business networking program that the City does, the company approached the City about doing a ‘no texting while driving’ promotion with the police department,” Howell said. “Our assistant city manager took a look at the product and asked us to call the company back. We did have a conversation with them. We decided to try it in the first couple of vehicles. We liked how it worked and then expanded it to the rest of the vehicles.”

Howell said that the improved communications allows him to direct vehicle operators to different locations and continue with their tasks in a more efficient manner.

“You can use cell phones hands free,” Howell said. “Especially when you’re driving a dump truck, and your hands are operating the plow or the spreader inside the cab, you don’t want to be handling a cell phone while driving. Hands-free is safer than using the cell phone while driving, so that was our take on that, especially since the cell phone is becoming a primary tool of communication.”

Howell said he believes the solution could work well for larger fleets that need to send out emergency notifications.

“Everybody is utilizing cell phones,” he said. “Whether it’s work related, someone is going to have a cell phone so their family members will be able to contact them in an emergency situation. You don’t want to use the open-air radio system for family emergencies. We thought it was a very useful safety tool. There are communities passing laws that say you must use a hands-free device with your cell phone.”

In addition, Got2bWireless’ device complies with all state hands-free mandates. For more information on state hands-free laws, you can visit the [Governor’s Highway Safety Association’s site here](#).

"Systems like those made by Got2bWireless comply with Michigan's new texting ban, said Anne Readett, spokeswoman for the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning."

By Greg Basich