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PIERCE PEPIN COOPERATIVE SERVICES CHOOSES STEEL AFTER FIELD TEST

In 1990, Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services of Ellsworth, Wisconsin decided to help a nearby manufacturer of steel transmission poles with a research and development project involving core ten (weathering) steel distribution poles. At the time, the cooperative did not realize it was gaining valuable experience with a product that would become a standard part of its future distribution system.

Jerry DeWolfe, Pierce Pepin's vice president of electric services, directed the project. "Our cooperative has always liked trying new technologies," he explains. "So after talking with the steel pole sales representative, we decided to give the new product a try with a one-mile installation."

DeWolfe says that getting started with the steel distribution poles was a very simple process. "Our linemen were very open to working with the new product, and they were surprised at the many similarities to installing or maintaining a wood distribution pole.

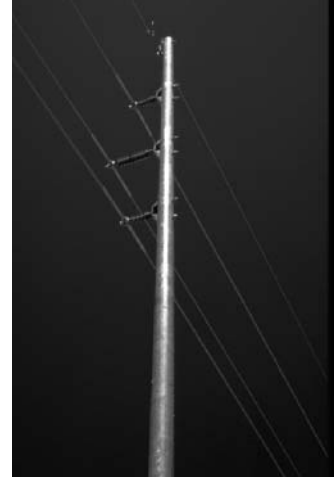


Jerry DeWolfe is Pierce Pepin's vice president of electric services.

"Since the beginning, our use of steel distribution poles has been problem-free," DeWolfe notes. "I believe we'll always have both steel and wood in our distribution system. But steel offers our cooperative several unique advantages."

For one, says DeWolfe, the steel poles in the Pierce Pepin system have proven their strength in various ways. He recalls a windstorm where steel poles stood tall while wood poles went down. "We had a straight-line westerly wind that came through with a vengeance. It hit three lines going to separate circuits. We had damage in a half-mile area around the wood poles. But the steel poles stayed up, with no damage."

He also remembers the time an automobile crashed into a steel distribution pole. "A driver went off the road and hit one of our steel poles head-on. A wood pole most likely would have sheared off, possibly causing dropped conductors and an outage, resulting in a real emergency. But the steel pole is still in service today!"



Pierce Pepin began using steel poles as a test in 1990.



Steel distribution poles are uniform in size, straight and smooth.

According to the Pierce Pepin veteran, steel poles shine in other ways. “They offer uniformity in a new distribution line and are aesthetically pleasing to many of our customers. Steel poles are perfectly straight and smooth, and do not fade in the sunlight. A special benefit of the smooth surface is that raccoons and other animals – even the neighbor’s cat -- cannot climb them and cause problems.”

He adds, “And because steel poles do not shrink, we have fewer problems with loose hardware, which translates into less maintenance for us.”

When looking at cost, Dewolfe comments, “Typically, if our structures have to be 40 feet or higher, we’ve found it is cost-effective to go with steel. Of course, we always look at every part of the installation situation before deciding on the type of pole we will use.”

DeWolfe notes Pierce Pepin was one of the first cooperatives in Wisconsin to try steel distribution poles as an alternative to wood. Between 1990 and 2003, the utility has increased its initial one-mile and 15-pole test line to eight miles and 120 steel distribution poles in its total system.

“We’ve had other cooperatives in the state come in and look at what we’ve done with steel. Some have even converted to steel poles. In a nutshell, we just see steel poles as another piece that fits into our ‘distribution system puzzle’ on a daily basis.”

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Pierce Pepin led the way in the use of steel distribution poles among coops in Wisconsin.