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TRANSPORTATION

Springs puts up solar traffic lights

As one city in the Sunshine State uses solar energy as a Band-Aid for traffic signal outages, other cities may be getting hurricane-proof signals.

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When power failures and downed traffic lights left the streets of Broward a hazard to travel, Coral Springs turned to nature's best source of energy: the sun.

Since Friday, Coral Springs has put up temporary solar-powered traffic signals at seven of its 72 intersections that have no power. Four more are on their way from the manufacturer. IST International www.IntelligentSignals.com (513) 891-1888.

And as far as city police are concerned, the signals are a genuine lifesaver.

"They work perfectly and look just like regular traffic signals," said police spokesman Sgt. Rich Nicorvo. "They are automatic, have a solar battery that stores enough energy for four days, and even have turning signals."

Nicorvo said that once an intersection is fixed and power is restored, the solar traffic signals will then be moved to another intersection in need.

"It also helps keep our police off the intersections at night, when it is most dangerous for them to direct traffic," added Nicorvo, who said one of his traffic officers was almost hit by a car the other day.

"The driver hit the officer's flashlight -- that's how close," he said.

Sheldon Armstrong, owner of IST International in Cincinnati, said the city contacted him last week to order the signals, which cost \$11,000 each.

Although the traffic signals can be used on a permanent basis, and even programmed to operate through the county's computerized traffic system, Armstrong said his signals are best suited to emergency situations.

"They are not hurricane-proof," Armstrong said. "They are best used when power is out at an intersection or when an intersection is damaged."

But one traffic system that fared well during the storm was the mast arm-type traffic signal, which is now used at 400 intersections throughout Broward County, said Christie Klammer, spokeswoman for the Florida Department of Transportation.

The mast arms make up 35 percent of Broward's signals and are designed to withstand winds up to 110 mph.

Jihad El Eid, Broward's traffic engineering director, said that 50 percent of these hurricane-resistant traffic signals sustained minor damage, and only three of them were destroyed.

"That was not the case with the existing span wire signals, most of which were destroyed," he said.

Klammer said the county cannot replace all of its span wire signals with mast heads because they cost more than \$150,000 each, or two to three times as much as the old type.

Nevertheless, mast arms are gradually being installed with each new resurfacing or reconstruction project.

Klammer said mast arms will be installed sooner along hurricane evacuation routes, at ports, and near the coast.

El Eid estimated it would cost the county at least \$140 million to replace existing span wire signals with mast arms. In the meantime, El Eid is concentrating on making sure the traffic signals damaged by Wilma get fixed.

As of late Tuesday, 750 of Broward's 1,332 damaged signals were repaired.

"We expect to have 85 percent of our signals fixed by Nov. 24 and be at 100 percent by mid-December," said Klammer, who said 52 crews from as far away as New York City are helping with the Broward effort.

Highway officials are now focusing their efforts on 11 corridors within a mile radius of a school.

"That's about 80 schools," said Klammer.

The corridors are: Sunrise Boulevard, Andrews Avenue, Oakland Park Boulevard, Powerline Road, Nob Hill Road, Rock Island Road, Lyons Road/31st Avenue, Pine Island Road, Atlantic Boulevard, Hiatus Road and Flamingo Road.

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PHOTOS BY DHL
LIGHTING UP: Coral Springs Officer Joe Barbuto rigs a four-way portable solar traffic signal.