



Electric Line Crews Connected 80 Navajo Nation Homes to the Grid During Mutual Aid Training Exercise

By Carol Tucker

LADWP electric line crews helped connect about 80 families of the Navajo Nation to the electric grid—many for the first time in their lives—while participating in a mutual aid training exercise with the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) in rural and rugged parts of New Mexico.

More than 40 LADWP electrical distribution mechanics, supervisors and helpers were deployed to travel to Navajo Nation land near Four Corners, New Mexico from November 12 through December 22, 2021 to participate in the training program. The crews gained valuable experience working in challenging conditions, including in adverse weather and isolated locations for 10-hour days to finish the projects. The biggest job was an extensive community powerline project in Chilchinbeto, Arizona that was 10 miles long, required installing 150 power poles, and powered up 20 homes.

“This mutual aid training exercise and the benefits far exceeded our expectations,” said Brian Wilbur, Senior Assistant General Manager of Power System Construction, Maintenance, and Operations at LADWP. “In this simulation we were able to deploy vehicles, personnel, and equipment to a remote location to perform restoration and infrastructure work over rugged terrain in harsh conditions. The challenges, pitfalls, and victories of this complete deployment is something we have not been able to examine when we do our typical tabletop training simulations,” he said.



Beyond the work itself, the interaction with the people of the Navajo Nation brought rewards that everyone involved will remember.

“Our crews were welcomed at every turn with incredible hospitality and appreciation for the work they were doing,” Wilbur said. “This project was a great success in accomplishing the goals of both utilities, but the warmth and appreciation of the families that were connected will have a lasting impression on everyone involved.”



LADWP crews trained for long hours to help connect Navajo Nation homes to the grid.

Walter Rodriguez, Director of Power Transmission and Distribution, recalled meeting a woman who was 70-years-old and had waited her entire life for electricity. "Our crews were installing new poles and lines in this vast area where the homes are miles apart," Rodriguez said.

LADWP's participation in the mutual aid program created mutual respect between the two utilities.

"Working with the incredible NTUA staff and their highly skilled workforce, who set up all of the construction projects, is what made this such a success," Wilbur said. The training program for distribution crews received support from executive leadership, the Office of Emergency Management, Fleet personnel, Procurement, and Communications groups.

The NTUA said Navajo Nation families expressed their deep gratitude to LADWP, telling the crews that having electricity has lifted a heavy burden. No more gasoline powered generators, no more ice chests, and no more having to store perishable food in the other refrigerators of family members nearby.

"Families are now enjoying the benefits of electricity, including setting up their homes for other services such as running water and cellular/internet communications," NTUA General Manager Walter Haase said. "We are thankful that LADWP chose the Navajo Nation as the location for its rural mutual-aid field training. We look forward to more partnership projects."

Photos courtesy of LADWP crews.