

How to Prevent Costly Downtime from Power Outages at Petrochemical Plants

Unplanned downtime at petrochemical plants due to electric power failure is more common and costly than the total of fires, floods, earthquakes, network outages, service failures, and hardware problems combined. Recent economic studies estimate the cost of downtime to the U.S. economy due to power outages exceeds \$150 billion annually.

Hourly downtime cost in the petrochemical industry is calculated in the tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars. And the health and safety implications of outage incidents can include catastrophic accidents and releases, making the system vulnerable to subsequent outages.

A utility problem? Not hardly. Eighty percent of outages at industrial plants are the direct result of the distribution system inside the plant – i.e., failed equipment and systems belonging to, and maintained by, the industrial plant.

“Even in the electric utility industry, the overwhelming approach to power outages is mitigation – not pre-emptive measures for prevention,” states John Lauletta, CEO of Exacter, Inc., an international provider of outage-avoidance systems and services. “How can plant managers take advantage of utility-grade solutions, when most utility strategies are run-to-failure?”

There are a variety of new solutions being developed in the utility industry using Exacter technology that identify failing equipment in the formative stages – long before an outage incident. “Our system finds electrical signatures emitted from overhead lines that indicate equipment degradation, or pre-fail condition,” continues Lauletta. “After surveying over two million poles for more than 120 utilities over the last three years, our technology has helped to pre-empt thousands of power outages.”

With Exacter, petrochemical plants finally have a utility-grade early-warning system that allows them to remove failing equipment long before an outage shuts the plant down.

“Exacter finds failing equipment that visual, infrared, and other methods cannot identify – meaning it will prevent outages that even the world’s best systems could not uncover,” states Exacter Vice President, Geoffrey Bibo.

While Exacter technology is not new to electric utilities, it is new to the petrochemical industry. “For plant applications, our field team conducts multiple physical surveys of the facility grounds each year. Equipment in pre-fail condition is identified, located, verified, and photographed for easy preventive maintenance action,” concludes Bibo. “The technology has been field-verified to be 100% accurate, and it’s the most far-reaching, pre-emptive measure for outage prevention in the petrochemical industry.”

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