



Remains of the La Veta tower



The mobile communications tower begins to take shape.



Emergency mobile communications tower

EMERGENCY MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS TOWER

The Spring Fire devoured nearly 109,000 acres and more than 130 homes. While destructive, the fire also fostered a sense of community and family in the small towns of southern Colorado. Smoke filled the skies of southern Colorado, it was visible everywhere. But there was something more powerful than the fire that could be seen and felt from Trinidad all the way up the Front Range. It was the desire and willingness of people wanting to cooperatively help.

San Isabel Electric is built on a cooperative model. The strength of the co-op model comes from the meaning of the word “cooperative”. The fire was exemplifying the same cooperative community values of San Isabel Electric Members and staff. Our strength comes from the relationships we build and maintain together with you and our communities.

The Spring Fire began on Wednesday, June 27. Our communications tower was destroyed the next day. The automated meters use the tower to communicate information back to headquarters. The tower also provides the main radio communications path for lineworkers’ trucks and handheld radios when they’re in the field. Our crews working in the burn zones had two goals: to get the lights back on and help Members recover as quickly as possible.

When the tower was destroyed, lineworkers had no way to communicate with each other or back to headquarters, and we had no way of knowing which meters were destroyed or damaged by the fire. The loss of the tower made the dangerous working conditions of the fire even more treacherous.

An emergency mobile communications tower had been a recurring dream of one of our tech services engineers. The disastrous circumstances that would create the need for his wondrous idea to ignite arose during the Spring Fire.

Our tech services engineer hit the ground running and had supplies for the emergency mobile communications tower purchased by the third day of the fire. The electricians put in hours of hard work and by July 3 the structural integrity and mounting work began. The team finished the trailer on July 9 and it was deployed on La Veta Pass the next day.

The new mobile tower, enclosed in a 8-foot by 12-foot trailer, includes an automated meter, radio and networking infrastructure, even air conditioning to keep the stacks of equipment cool. It is powered by existing power lines or the generator that is also part of the mobile tower.

The emergency mobile communications tower is being used until we are finished rebuilding the tower and building on the new permanent site.

The disaster that created the need for a mobile communications tower was a nightmare for our tech services engineer. But his dream, along with San Isabel Electric’s desire to help get the lights back on, strengthened the co-op.

The mobile tower has increased the co-op’s level of emergency preparedness in the event of future nightmares, which are sure to be lurking in the years to come.