City of Kelowna, British Columbia, Case Study

Synopsis

After its laboratory water testing and meter reading team transitioned from a cumbersome manual employee safety monitoring system to the app-based Ok Alone, the group saw improvements in government-mandated safety compliance and overall employee safety. Combining Geotab with Ok Alone has seen even more opportunities to increase employee safety and efficiency.

The Challenge: Keeping employees safe

For many fleets, set routes and schedules are the operational framework that dictates a day's work. For others, the only guarantee is that each day will be different from the last – in this case, the ruling principle is variability.

In the City of Kelowna, British Columbia, the technicians that test the area's water supply and read residents' water meters have different schedules every day, which can take them from an urban, densely populated area to a rural, isolated one in minutes.

As a consequence of this operational reality, Water Quality and Customer Care Supervisor, Ed Hoppe, has to make sure that his technicians are safe, particularly when working in isolated areas alone.

For years the City used a paper-based system and citizen band (CB) radios to keep tabs on employees. Needless to say, it wasn't an efficient system.

"We relied on manual sign-in and sign-out sheets at our admin desk that were really cumbersome for our staff if they remembered to use it," says Hoppe. "We also had set check-in and check-out times. It was a very manual process."

While Hoppe's team was still using the manual process, the City's Safety Department was scouting for automated solutions to keep employees safe and meet compliance requirements. It found one: Ok Alone.

"The Safety Department approached me and asked if I would be interested in trying Ok Alone out," recalls Hoppe. "We are always looking to be innovative with our approach to safety so I was willing to try it out."

After meeting with representatives of Ok Alone, Hoppe was eager to get rid of the paper sign-in and -out sheets.

City of Kelowna Profile

Agency:
City of Kelowna

**Industry:**
Local Government

Based in:
Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada

Types of vehicles:
SUVs, pickups, vans

Fleet size:
11
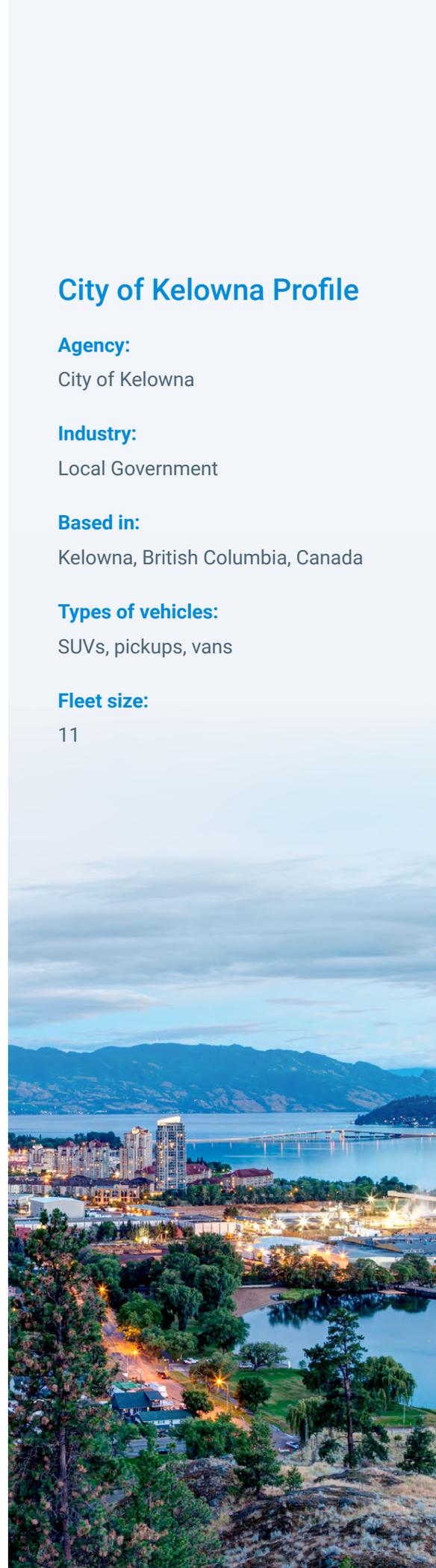
The Solution: Maintaining a smooth rollout

Hoppe says the rollout to Ok Alone was "very smooth." The Ok Alone app was added to technicians' phones, so there was no need to invest in extra equipment or training. And being an app-based solution, the employees found it easy to use from the first day.

"Ok Alone is very user-intuitive," says Hoppe. "And the functionality is simple."

That's not to say that there weren't some initial hiccups that had to be addressed. Hoppe says that during the early days, he and his team had to work closely with the Ok Alone customer support team to address questions and functionality issues. He chalks that up to it being a new-to-the-organization system and notes that whatever the question was, it was quickly resolved. Today, he and his team have few, if any, issues. The Ok Alone team regularly checks in with Hoppe to discuss how things are going.

More than keeping tabs on employees

Ok Alone allows Hoppe to keep his department in compliance with provincial and federal guidelines related to health and safety. As part of those guidelines, there is a required risk assessment that has to be made if a technician is going into a risky area. With Ok Alone, the risk assessment can be done on the fly, keeping the technician safe and allowing for timely response to any emergent problems the Hoppe's team needs to address.

This is critical since technicians often work alone and, as Hoppe points out, could be moving from a city to rural location in a matter of just a few minutes. Typically, technicians are required to check in about every two hours, or more frequently for riskier environments, and it's working.

"Ok Alone has met our working alone policy requirements," says Hoppe.

And it's not just Hoppe's laboratory technicians that have benefited from Ok Alone. The meter readers have also benefited, since they, too, can encounter unexpected hazards, such as aggressive dogs.

Ok Alone provides agencies that have workers who do their jobs offsite and alone numerous benefits, including:

- SMS, auto-phone calls, emails and WhatsApp to alert managers

- Safety audit logs to demonstrate compliance

- Apps for Android and iPhone

- Safety zone (geo fencing)

- Safety awards and rankings to engage workers and managers

- Hands free status updates and help signal, using Siri and Google Assistant

- GPS monitoring reports

- Timesheet reports

- High-risk check ins

- Man down monitoring

- Worker grouping and group escalations

- Help button to immediately alert managers

- 24/7 support

- NEW: Drive Mode – Automated check-ins when driving with Geotab

The benefits of going digital

"The sheet is no longer needed nor are manual check-ins when entering high-hazard areas that have shorter check-in requirements," he says. "Staff have said that Ok Alone is really convenient and easy to use. It saves time and makes it safer for the staff."

For example, Hoppe says that employees have had to use the "help" button a few times.

"It's really an added benefit," he says.

Hoppe adds that the Ok Alone app will soon be used by the Water Treatment Department, and he expects the "man down" feature will be a particular benefit, since these employees are often in lone-worker situations where they can get into physical trouble.

Hoppe also uses the after-hours monitoring feature, which is another benefit he's seen for the solution, particularly during the transition to the end of a technician's shift.
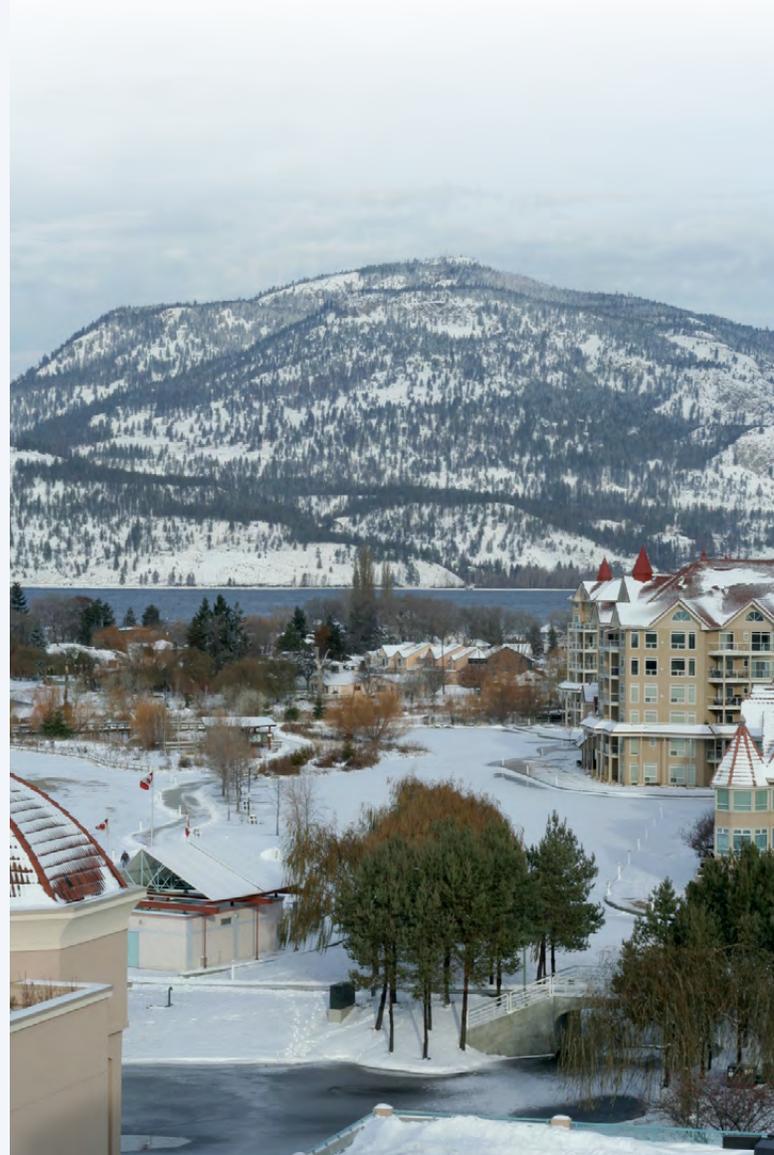
The Results: Adding Geotab

Initially, Hoppe and his team were using Ok Alone as a standalone product that was loaded on technicians' phones.

However, Ok Alone is available as an add-on to Geotab's telematics solution –
and is how many agencies use it. Since the rest of the City was using Geotab, Hoppe was approached about using the telematics solution as well.

Again, there was a natural fit.

"Since we're service oriented and work all over the area, the dispatching function was a benefit," says Hoppe. "It's a way of making efficient use of time."

With the Geotab reporting capabilities, Hoppe can now track routes for training new employees, and generally has seen an improvement in better routes and more efficient use of resources. He also has access to employees' Ok Alone status on the Geotab dashboard. Ok Alone can be easily added to the Geotab solution right from the dashboard.

Routing is just the beginning. Hoppe says that the team will begin using the driver and idling scorecard features in the near future to help technicians stay safe behind the wheel and to fulfill the mandate to cut vehicle emissions.

Combining Ok Alone and the Geotab solution has been a good pairing for Hoppe and his staff.

"Having Ok Alone paired with Geotab is a great feature from a management point of view," he says. "With vehicles and staff visible on the same app, it provides me with both location and safety assurance and is a one-stop shop for assessing field work."

Benefits of the Ok Alone and Geotab solutions

- Ok Alone features "man down" and "help features"
- Ok Alone automates employee status and check-ins
- Ok Alone helps organizations meet compliance requirements
- Ok Alone can be easily integrated into the Geotab solution
- Geotab improves routing
- Geotab provides safety and idling reporting capabilities

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