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## ***Utilities Rethink Failing Maintenance Strategies***

Deregulation is increasingly forcing utilities to not only improve customer service and control costs but also to address Quality of Service (QoS) measures imposed by the regulators. To ensure utilities achieve QoS targets in a cost-effective manner, Convergent Europe's asset performance team has developed a unique reliability centered maintenance (RCM) practice designed to support utilities in transforming the effectiveness of asset management programs.

Originating in the aviation industry, where safety is paramount, RCM can boost levels of safety while vastly reducing levels of expenditure. If applied correctly, RCM can offer the same benefits to a utility organization. As a global system integration firm, Convergent Europe has compiled a team of specialists who have worked in the RCM arena for more than a decade to implement RCM throughout Europe. The team already has assisted companies such as East Midlands Electricity

and SWALEC to improve their asset management strategies.

RCM is a methodology—a way of doing business—that helps Convergent Europe's utility customers reengineer a more cost-effective approach to asset management. Most utilities still maintain their equipment and distribution systems the old fashioned way. To guard against asset failure, they implement some form of planned or preventative maintenance. Physical assets are maintained out of fear that not doing so could cause equipment or system breakdown.

Hard evidence suggests that this may be the wrong approach to guaranteeing reliability and customer service. RCM begins with asking basic questions that help a utility better understand its physical assets and the implications of an asset failure. Without this type of analysis, utilities face the challenge of cutting costs without fully evaluating the consequences. This happened in 1998 in Auckland, New Zealand,

when the city's central business division lost power for several days.

"The beauty of RCM is that it can work for any type of utility including electric, gas, water and wastewater," said Tony Geraghty, Convergent Europe's RCM business unit manager. RCM can help any size utility or energy company increase its efficiency and cut costs. RCM also gives regulated utilities the evidence they need to prove compliance with sometimes stringent guidelines covering basic QoS and energy delivery.

"An RCM-based program will fundamentally reengineer a utility's asset management approach," Geraghty said. "By utilizing our methodology, utilities can go forward with more confidence; reliability is increased and maintenance minimized. Given the challenge that our utilities face, this will become indispensable."

**For more information on this subject, circle 863 on the reader service card.**