

# IBEW Local 17 Solves Labour Crunch with Vortex Simulator

## Challenges

At IBEW Local 17, journeyman substation technicians are both highly skilled and highly multifaceted. The hazardous nature of their work means that working with qualified, competent operators is critical. "You can't make mistakes," says Jeff Mitchell, Local 17's Assistant Business Manager. "If you tip over a crane at an energized substation, there's potential not just for killing yourself but killing a lot of people — plus the amount of damage ... it's big money and bigger consequences." However, good journeymen are in short supply. Training novices is risky and expensive — and it's difficult for apprentices to get seat time prior to certification. Without a viable way of training, IBEW Local 17 was facing a shortage of skilled labour.

## Solution

For IBEW Local 17, the solution was a Vortex Simulator, loaded with construction equipment operator training modules, plus instructor station. The Vortex Mobile Crane and Excavator operator training modules feature progressive learning exercises — from beginner to advanced — that are designed to gradually build student skill and confidence. The Mobile Crane module is particularly useful to the local. That's because it is really the only way for apprentices to get active seat time — which is essential to the local in their quest to field highly qualified personnel. "None of our contractors is going to allow anyone in their crane unless they have a crane certification," Mitchell notes. "That's where the Vortex simulator comes in.

Apprentices can get in the sim, and by the time they've worked through the exercises, they will know exactly what to expect when they get in the real crane." The simulator's ability to replicate inclement weather and machine faults also teaches trainees to respond safely to conditions it would be unsafe or impractical to replicate in real life.



## Profile

The IBEW labour union represents nearly 750,000 workers and retirees in the electrical industry. IBEW Local 17, based in Detroit, Michigan, builds municipal and commercial electrical installations, including new power line constructions, traffic signals, roadway lighting, and transmission towers.

The Vortex Simulator is an always-on resource — rain, snow, or shine. And thanks to the "real feel" of the simulator, apprentices learn productivity skills that translate directly into efficiency in the field. "The Vortex Simulator makes it possible for us to have a training program in place where we didn't have one before," Mitchell says. "With the simulator, they come in at their own pace, and take as much time as they want."

## Results

The Vortex Simulator has rapidly become an indispensable part of IBEW Local 17's training program. The local is now attracting a new generation of talent with a safe, cost-effective, and innovative training tool. "I just don't see how we could compete without it," Mitchell concludes. "We've had about 9 guys where the only exposure they've had to a crane is the Vortex Simulator — and after, they were able to go and pass their NCCCO crane certification practical exam.