CHARLESTOWN NEVIS (OCTOBER 6, 2005) -- The Nevis Electricity Company Limited (NEVLEC) will join its counterparts in the region when it implements the Geographic Information System (GIS), a computerised technology used for mapping and data collection which also serves as a cost cutting measure.

The disclosure was made by Mrs Anelda Maynard Date, Transmission and Distribution Engineer while a Caribbean Association for Electric Utilities (CARILEC) GIS Task Force implementation team met in Nevis for a two-day meeting on October 3-4, 2005.

According to Mrs Maynard Date, NEVLEC had already completed a needs assessment and the next phase entails the mapping of the poles on the island to effect a proper inventory of their hardware (the poles and their location) which will commence shortly but she did not give a specific date for implementation.

She said NEVLEC had so far received assistance from the Caribbean Association for Electric Utilities (CARILEC) GIS Task Force members from Barbados, Antigua, Grenada and St. Lucia.

The Task Force, an advisory body to CARILEC that is headed by Dr Philip Corbin of the Barbados Light and Power Company Limited, met in Nevis for the first time as it sought to encourage utility companies in the Caribbean particular from its 29 members to implement the system.

The group includes representatives from eight utility companies at present - Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Nevis and according to Dr. Corbin the group acts as an advisory body to improve the technology in the region; to identify pitfalls to assist with implementation at the various utility companies of mapping systems; to develop standards; to evaluate training programmes and suggest improvements and to guide the development of the data bases necessary for implementing GIS in the utilities.

Dr Corbin said the utility companies had become more receptive to implementing the technology because of the dramatic drop in cost adding that in the past extremely expensive software and hardware only allowed the larger utility companies to implement it.

Notwithstanding he believes that GIS technology was on the verge of a worldwide revolution. "I foresee that the technology is going to get cheaper, more accessible more widely used. It's really going to invade every area of society and we (CARILEC) are very excited about what's going to be happening and we (CARILEC) are pleased to be on the forefront of such exciting technology," he said adding that the technology would invade areas that they were not even aware of right now.

"Because what's going to happen, I believe, is wireless technology is going to take off which enables the software to monitor the locations and the status of devices remotely. It's almost as if everything is going to be monitored and mapped and that is going to mean tremendous benefits," he said.

Regarding added costs to consumers with the implementation of the GIS, Dr. Corbin said it would be passed on indirectly but in essence the utility companies would save in their operations which would be passed on to the consumer. He said too that the implementation of the new technology would not result in staff lay offs but instead would mean a change of mentality of the linesmen or the persons out in the field.

"We will still need men we will still need the staff. What is going to happen is it going to actually mean more job opportunities for people who get into the mapping arena and it's going to increase the efficiency of the existing staff. It would not mean actually staff lay offs what it would mean though is a change in the mentality of the linesmen or the people out in the field," he said adding that they would be able to be trained in the use of computer technology and be more efficient.

Mr Lawrence Benjamin Project Manager of CARILEC, said that they have embraced the technology and are pleased with the progress regarding the implementation of GIS in the member utility companies. He said CARILEC had ventured into new areas including disaster management using GIS to assess the vulnerability of the system which he said would make it much easier to recover and to implement recovery procedures

(L-R) Mr. Lawrence Benjamin, Dr. Phillip Corbin and Mrs Anelda Maynard Date.