

Photo: Suncrest Capital

CASE STUDY



For Suncrest, Smart Meters Mean Fewer Leaks, Higher Revenues, and Happier Residents

After installing Metron meters, manufactured housing leader boosted recapture rates by around 30% across its portfolio.

For Suncrest Capital ([suncrestcap.com](https://www.suncrestcap.com)), an investment company that operates affordable manufactured home communities in Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, and Louisiana, fixing leaky pipes and promoting responsible water use by residents is a top priority.

“For mobile-home companies, addressing water and sewer issues is the single easiest way to lower your expenses,” explains Kristen Hensley, Suncrest’s Head of Asset Management. “It’s an area where things can get very expensive, but where you can also take practical steps to control your costs.”

To help in that process, Suncrest relies on Metron master meters and per-pad submeters, which provide granular real-time water usage insights both for individual residences and for entire MHP communities. Compared to waiting for a monthly or quarterly utility bill, that’s transformative, Hensley explains.

“With Metron, we can get the data we need, at the time we need to see it,” Hensley says. “It’s allowed us to find leaks and make repairs, which in turn lowers our operating expenses.”

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Suncrest first encountered Metron’s solutions after acquiring Rolling Meadows, a 112-lot village near Branson, MO, where Metron meters were already in use. “When we see something cool like that in one of these properties that we acquire, we start thinking about what can it do for us in our other parks?” Hensley explains.

Today, Suncrest has installed Metron hardware in 14 out of its portfolio of 18 mobile home communities, identifying leaks and boosting portfolio-wide recapture rates by up to 30%. “The money we’ve been able

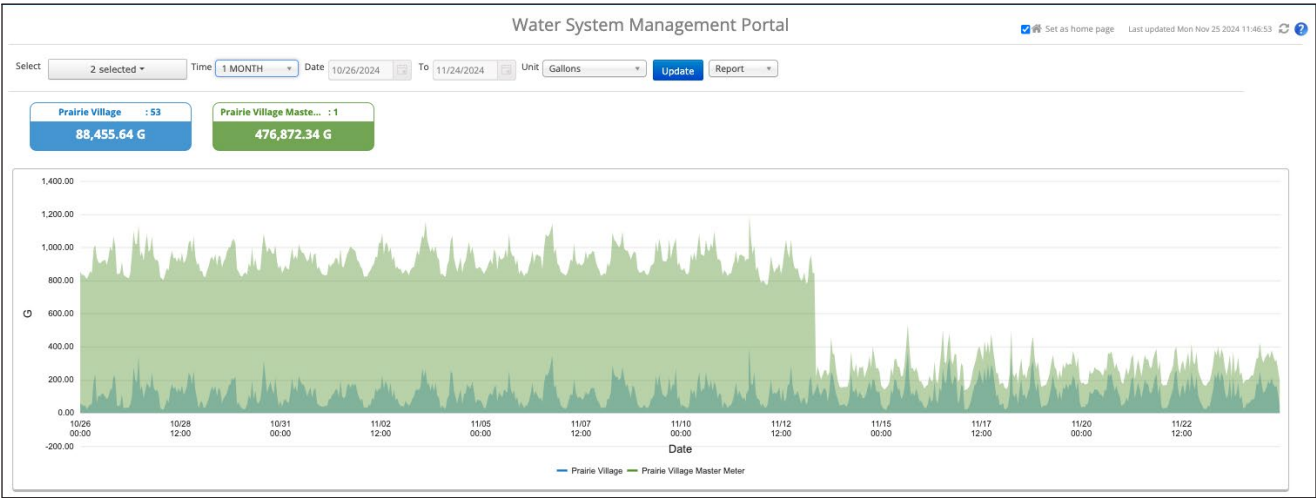
to save just by using Metron, is considerable,” Hensley says.

No more mystery leaks

Some of Suncrest’s biggest cost-savings have come by using Metron solutions to find and fix large, previously untraceable leaks. At Suncrest’s Prairie Village mobile home community in Booneville, Iowa, for instance, the rocky, wooded terrain made it hard to physically inspect for leaks, or even to place zone meters. After installing a Metron master meter, though, the team quickly identified a plus-sized leak.

The Suncrest team worked with residents to halt water use at a particular time, then turned off the valves running to the six different zones of the park. “When we turned them back on one at a time, we could watch the Metron master meter to see which areas of the park were losing water,” Hensley explains. “Being able to narrow it down like that is super useful—thanks to that visibility, we finally found the leak.”

It turned out that Prairie Village—a community of just 89 residences—had been losing over 560,000 gallons per month due to a few huge leaks. Thanks to Metron, the team almost immediately cut those losses by over 450,000 gallons per month, reducing the community’s monthly water bills by over \$1,500. “That’s a lot of money for one small property,” Hensley says. “We’re talking real savings.”



WaterScope shows the dramatic change in water losses when the repair was made.

There’s still room for further improvement, of course. But with a Metron master meter in place, finding and plugging leaks no longer feels like an impossible task. “We’re still finding little leaks here and there,” Hensley says. “But Metron makes it possible to find the needle in the haystack, and get the leaks addressed quickly.”

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No more RUBS

Besides fixing stubborn leaks, Metron’s meters allows Suncrest to pass on water costs to individual households based on their actual consumption, rather than averaging bills across the entire property using a ratio utility billing system, or RUBS. That’s a big upgrade, because it encourages residents to be more mindful about their water use. “Before we started using Metron, it was really a free-for-all—people were acting as though water and sewer was free,” Hensley says. “With costs rising continually, that isn’t really viable.”

As water bills climbed, tensions would sometimes flare. “RUBS can cause disputes between neighbors,”

Hensley says. “People would see their neighbor down the street with their garden hose out washing six different cars in their driveway. And meanwhile Grandma Susie over here is having to pay for the water those people are literally wasting.”

Now, people know they’re only getting charged for what they actually use, and they can see how their consumption impacts their monthly bill. “We have the manager pull reports for them, and we include meter readings in their account statements,” Hensley explains. “They can see that we aren’t just pulling numbers out of the air—and having that transparency strengthens our relationship with them.”

No more surprises

Metron’s WaterScope data portal also enables community managers to warn residents of potential issues that might lead to higher-than-expected bills. “We can see if they’re using an abnormal amount of water, and flag it if they might have a leaky toilet or a dripping tap,” Hensley says. “Utilizing Metron, we can detect problems in real time, so there’s no sticker shock at the end of the month.”

Using WaterScope, managers can also spot in-unit leaks, and even tell whether a leak is likely the result of a stuck valve, a broken pipe, or a leaky heater. “This makes residents extremely happy—we’re able to tell them, hey, go check your heater for leaks,” Hensley says. “Trust me, they are thankful when we alert them that they may have a problem.”

Spotting leaks early is especially important in mobile homes, because an invisible leak can easily cause serious damage to the subfloor, or lead to expensive and hard-to-remediate issues such as mold, swollen insulation, or damaged ductwork.

“By giving visibility to our managers, Metron winds up saving our residents money on repair costs,” Hensley says. “Stuff always breaks sooner or later, but Metron gives us a little bit of forewarning—and our residents like knowing their manager is keeping an eye on things.”

No more human error

While there’s a learning curve for community managers, Metron’s meters and software are remarkably easy to use. “I do all my own training, and create my own training documents for folks,” Hensley says. “It’s simple enough that my nine-year-old granddaughter could do it.” It also helps that WaterScope integrates seamlessly with Suncrest’s existing property management software. “I love, love, love that the fact that it’s all automatically uploaded into our software,” Hensley adds.

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That means less work for community managers, and less chance of human error. The benefits were particularly clear at one Suncrest property in Iowa, which had previously used old manual meters, and where a community manager’s husband—a senior with glaucoma—used to have to trek around collecting readings. “He couldn’t use a smartphone, and trying to read his handwriting was a little bit rough,” Hensley says.

With Metron’s smart meters in place, though, things got a whole lot easier. “We don’t have to have somebody go out there trudging in the snow, or in a downpour, or God knows what else to physically read the meters—it automatically uploads, with no room for human error,” Hensley says. “It’s made us all very, very happy.”

Metron’s customer support has been excellent, too. “I deal mostly with Lisa Bach, and she really is great,” Hensley says. Suncrest doesn’t need much help, but it’s good to know the Metron team is on call

if they're needed. "The very few times we've had problems, they've worked as fast as possible to resolve them," Hensley says. "There are always going to be hiccups, but I do appreciate the hustle in getting them resolved."

Keeping costs low for everyone

For a company that's committed to providing affordable, high-quality housing, managing water costs will always be a top priority, Hensley says. That's why Suncrest is delighted to have found Metron—and plans to keep rolling out Metron's meters across its mobile home communities.

"Using Metron helps us to improve our communities, while keeping rents in the affordable housing range," Hensley says. "By reducing waste and creating visibility for residents, we're keeping water costs low for everyone."

Get in touch with Metron:

Email: hello@metron-us.com

Phone: 303.449.8833

Web: metron-us.com

