



CASE STUDY

ASAP Systems Helps Arlington County Fire Department Extinguish Inefficiencies With Better Tracking

Case Study Overview

COMPANY:

Arlington County Fire Department
www.fire.arlingtonva.us

INDUSTRY:

Fire and EMS

BUSINESS CHALLENGE:

The logistics branch tracks the location and status of hundreds of disposable inventory and fire equipment for 10 fire stations and over 320 employees.

SOLUTION:

Passport Stock Inventory
Passport Assets

BENEFITS:

- Integrates vendor information into the system, associating inventory and assets with a particular contract
- Reduced human error and time taken to perform physical inventory
- Reporting feature improved information sharing and refined their budget allocations



ARLINGTON COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT, LOGISTICS BRANCH

The logistics Branch of the Arlington County Fire Department (ACFD) has a centralized warehouse and responsible for inventory management and asset tracking at the department's 10 fire stations as well as the fire training and fire marshals offices. When Lamar Smith, Arlington's Fire and EMS warehouse coordinator, first came into his role, the department was doing all their tracking manually with pen, paper and Excel. With a background in inventory management in the Air Force and at Canada Dry, Smith knew there was a more efficient and accurate way for the department to track inventory and assets.

THE CHALLENGE

The logistics Branch tracks hundreds of items for ACFD's more than 10

fire stations and 320 employees — everything from disposable inventory such as paper towels, soap and toilet paper to large assets such as washers and refrigerators to expiration dated items like the firefighters' personal protective equipment (PPE) and other fire equipment that needs regular maintenance and inspection, such as fire extinguishers.

The team is responsible for the overall management of all the department's inventory and assets, including checking equipment out and in for all stations and employees, stocking inventory, ordering new items, maintaining and replacing items and more.

"Our main challenge is being able to track where and how much is being spent at each fire station and on each employee for both inventory items and

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asset items,” says Smith. “Some assets are being used and consumed — for example, fire hoses and uniforms go out in the field and don’t come back; our Tide soap does not come back. We treat these as consumable inventory that we issue out. Other items are treated as assets — for example, saws that have to be maintained or replaced. Once a saw breaks down on an apparatus, we may have to check out a spare until it gets repaired.”

The team needed an inventory management and asset tracking system that would allow them to:

- Efficiently, accurately and easily perform physical inventory and asset counts at all stations and at the central warehouse
- Generate and share custom reports that showed how each station was consuming items over specific periods of time, where expenditures were escalating and more.
- Update their team when items expired, were in need of maintenance or replacement, or needed to be re-stocked
- Customize field names and other features within the system to fit the specific needs of the fire department
- Quickly get started through easy-to-use tutorials and an easy-to-learn interface

FINDING A SYSTEM TO FIT THEIR TRACKING REQUIREMENTS

Smith’s research led him to ASAP System’s Passport system for inventory management and asset tracking, paired with

motorola scanners, and a barcode printer and labels. One of the features that sold him on ASAP Systems was being able to customize the data input fields as he wanted.

“I like this system because it gave us the freedom to create a tracking process that was customized to our requirements,” explains Smith. “With a lot of other systems, what you get is what you use. They generate a stock number for you that’s sequential, and that’s it. What if we wanted to do it another way?”

Smith says, for example, that he enters the serial numbers for all ACFDs personal protective equipment (PPE) along with expiration dates. With this information entered into the system, the logistics team knows when a firefighter’s PPE is going to expire and needs replacing. He can also quickly generate and share reports with his supervisors showing how many sets of gear they need to order for the following year. These reports can be sliced any way he wants: by station, by multiple stations, by employee and more.

Passport’s tutorial, embedded within the software, was also a selling point. Smith says this was very important because he is the only logistics person in the organization. The other users are fire fighters who needed to learn how to use the software quickly, as well as being able use it when Smith wasn’t present. The tutorial was key to making this possible.

SETTING UP A TRACKING PROCESS

Smith spent a lot of time focusing on the best way to set up his tracking processes ahead of time, establishing a uniform system that was user-friendly and easy to expand. He set up each fire station as its own site with a specific tracking identification number. A tracking number was also assigned to

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each employee and fire apparatus, making it easy to issue an asset or inventory to a particular location, vehicle or individual. And because Smith was able to customize field names within the system, he created his own coding system.

Every item's stock number starts with "FD" for fire department. Smith generated a number series starting with 101 for household goods, 202 for uniforms, 303 for appliances, 404 for equipment, etc. The numbers for each particular "item" can expand from there.

As an example:

FD-101-01 . . . FD-101-02 . . . FD-101-03 . . .
FD-201-01 . . . FD-201-02 . . . FD-201-03 . . .
FD-301-01 . . . FD-301-02 . . . FD-301-03 . . .

Additionally, Smith can also include greater detail for stock numbers to identify each station, for example: "FS01" or "FS02" for fire station 1 or fire station 2.

FD-FS01-101-01 . . . FD-FS01-101-02 . . .
FD-FS02-101-01 . . . FD-FS02-101-02 . . .
FD-FS03-101-01 . . . FD-FS03-101-02 . . .

"If you're dedicated to the system, it will work," says Smith, "but you have to have a process in place. you could make it elaborate, but that's not really user friendly. I suggest making it as easy as you can because you have to take into consideration that other employees will be using it — not all of whom are trained in inventory management."

The logistics team prints barcodes in-house with a barcode label printer. They print out full sheets and put them in three-ring binders so the team can scan the barcode for a particular

item from their desk. It's not feasible to put barcodes on the actual items, considering the environment in which most PPEs and other equipment frequently are in. They also have a barcode folder in the warehouse, in case a team member needs to access it there.

ACCURATE REPORTING LEADS TO COST SAVINGS

Smith says the custom reporting feature in Passport helped his team tighten their overall budget expenditure by revealing where the department needs to decrease or increase spending. In addition, it allows the team to share important information with the "higher ups," including the logistics chief and station commander.

"When the logistics chief says, 'what did Station 5 spend from one particular date to another?' I can pull a report for him," explains Smith, "and every month I automatically send a report so everyone knows exactly what each station is spending."

The added convenience of being able to email the reports straight from the ASAP Systems software makes the whole process more efficient. Smith also keeps historical records of all his reports should he need to reference them again.

Smith points out one area, in particular, where his reports helped save ACFD thousand of dollars. Clothing dryers at several of the fire stations were breaking on a regular basis, which meant the logistics team was frequently going out to the stations, pulling the broken dryers, replacing them with temporary dryers, and then bringing the broken dryers back to the warehouse to fix or replace them.

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The organization was unaware of just how much this was costing the department in time and money until Smith ran a report, which clearly showed that spending on dryers was unusually high. This led his team to further investigate the issue. It turned out, many of the stations were using old dryer systems that were getting clogged. To alleviate the problem, Smith implemented a preventative maintenance program for regular vent cleaning on the station's dryers — all of which could be tracked within Passport. The program has cut thousands in labor and repair and replacement costs for the stations.

TRACKING AUTOMATION MEANS EFFICIENCY

Prior to installing ASAP Systems inventory management and asset tracking software, the logistics team of ACFD did everything manually with pen, paper and an Excel spreadsheet.

“This meant the team was spending a couple hundred man hours each year manually counting items and then putting that data into a spreadsheet,” says Smith.

By automating these processing with ASAP Systems' software and using barcodes and wireless scanners to capture data, the time it takes to do physical inventory counts and the element of human error has been cut dramatically. In addition, the team can easily slice and dice the data, quickly generating reports on all aspects of their tracking — never having to manually configure data themselves.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

With the flexibility of the ASAP Systems solution, Smith says his team will expand their tracking to include more detailed, additional information that will make workflow more efficient. For example, he will integrate vendor information into the system, associating assets and inventory with a particular contract. This will allow the team to generate a purchase order (Po) when a particular item is running low or needs to be replaced.

The logistics department is also planning for more detailed tracking of the assets on each station's fire apparatus and EMS vehicles. For example, each fire engine and apparatus will be associated with its specific equipment, such as saws, ladders, pike poles, axes, fire extinguishers, hoses, etc. If Engine 105 needs a circular saw, the team will be automatically notified and they can quickly pull up the vendor

and part number within the ASAP Systems tracking software, generate a purchase order and send it via email with the click of a button.

Now that's putting out a fire before it even starts.

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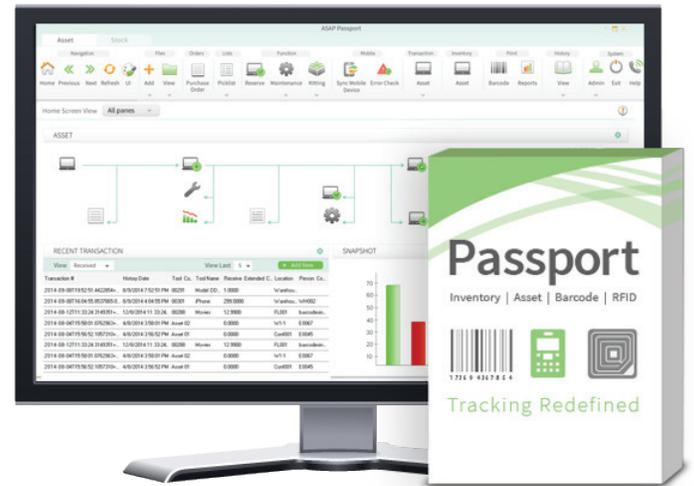
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