



Managing prevention

Tim Vernon of Optevia highlights how inadequate access to data has a direct impact on home safety, and argues for better data-sharing across fire prevention and safety teams.

"Unconnected and often paper-based admin systems simply cannot live up to the demands of the modern fire service."

The UK Government's modernisation agenda for the fire service (as outlined in the 2003 white paper *Our Fire and Rescue Service*) calls for a greater emphasis on fire prevention activities not least since the white paper recognised that 50 per cent of fire-related deaths reportedly take place before the fire service is even called*.

No one disputes the need for fire prevention activities in a modern fire service, but there has been debate around how these duties are managed and the impact this has on firefighters' workloads, firefighter safety and essential emergency response.

The Fire Brigades Union**, Health and Safety Executive***, and Audit Commission**** may all have distinct positions on the issues surrounding fire safety, yet seemingly common to all are the views that inadequate fire-prevention workload management, inadequate training and inadequate access to accurate risk assessment data has a direct effect on the safety of the public at home and at work and on firefighters in the line of duty.

Fire and rescue services typically have three teams that carry out fire safety and prevention activities: community safety teams tasked with fire prevention in the home, technical fire safety teams tasked with monitoring how commercial and public organisations comply with fire regulations, and the emergency operations teams who are tasked with ensuring the safety of operational fire fighters in the line of duty.

Each of these teams generates valuable risk-related data that can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the prevention and/or management of fire incidents. To operate

at maximum efficiency in preventing avoidable deaths and damage to livelihoods and property, fire services need timely access to accurate risk-related data, no matter which team generated the intelligence. Yet in many cases the back office systems that support the storage, management and analysis of life-critical information are inadequate and out-dated.

Unconnected and often paper-based admin systems simply cannot live up to the demands of the modern fire service nor do justice to the sophisticated risk data that the safety teams generate and work with.

Further, the additional work created by the stand-alone systems not only adds to the burden of administrative duties, impacting on the time that fire prevention teams could be out using their skills and experience to make a difference, but often it cannot effectively capture and support the need for case escalation and the historical intelligence and analysis essential to enforcement work.

No one software system can provide a panacea for the issues around fire service data management. Yet many of the issues touched on above can be addressed, simply, cost effectively and efficiently, without the need for risky large scale IT implementations with their accompanying challenges of time, resource and budget. Top six benefits for fire services of risk-related data-sharing:

- Better data: cleaner, more accurate: Consistent data forms across community, technical and operations teams mean data is captured, analysed and reported against easily, creating valuable insights and speeding up the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) returns process.

- Manage workloads better: Better scheduling and management of risk assessments cuts down on unnecessary admin, freeing up officers to focus on their core areas of fire and safety expertise.
- Enforcement: Effective case management ensures that audit histories for properties are easily accessed, deferred audits are tracked, enforcement issues are managed and, where necessary, cases can be escalated.
- Sharing life-critical data: Information taken from community, technical and operational assessments can be combined with data from incidents to continually inform and improve local knowledge and training activities. Further, data shared between teams can be used to pre-brief auditing teams, and supplement audit reports.
- Availability of risk-related information: All life-critical information, irrespective of source, can be made available in a timely fashion to better inform fire fighters in the line of duty. Combined live risk-data from all sources can be accessed on the mobile data terminals in fire appliances improving fire fighters' dynamic assessment of risk when attending an incident.
- Risk assessment: The dynamic risk assessment improvements afforded by delivering live life-critical data to officers in the field are clear. In addition, an ever more

accurate and sophisticated understanding of the complex interplay of physical, geographical, behavioural and socio-economic influences can be developed by combining intelligence from the three safety programmes with incident data. This continually improving assessment of risk leads to increasingly effective prevention strategies and tactics.

Public sector CRM specialist Optevia has experience in integrating and customising Microsoft Dynamics CRM specifically for fire services. Microsoft Dynamics CRM is an easy to use system that tightly integrates with other familiar Microsoft systems such as Outlook. Optevia can quickly design and implement a customised installation of Microsoft Dynamics CRM for fire services by using its replicable workflow templates and integration gateways into core fire service applications, meaning that an effective, efficient service can be up, running and delivering real business benefits in a very short period of time.

*<http://www.politics.co.uk/briefings-guides/issue-briefs/policing-and-crimelfire-and-rescue-service-366552.htm>

** "In the line of duty. Firefighter deaths in the UK since 1978". A report by the Labour Research Department (LRD) for the Fire Brigades Union, November 2008

*** <http://www.hse.gov.uk/press/2008/e08002.htm>

****<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/accessible.asp?ProdID=65813F7C-C7DB-41f9-BAD6-3EA0EE82B6DE>

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