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Customer Solution Success Story

The City of Monterey Chooses APX Data for Digital Preplanning

Overview

Country or Region: Monterey, California, United States

Industry: Emergency Services

Customer Profile: Monterey has a resident population of about 35,000, which can swell to upwards of 70,000 during special events like the Monterey Jazz Festival.

Organizational Situation: With a merger of several municipal departments each with a preplanning process, it was time to consolidate and rethink preplanning.

Solution: The City of Monterey selected APX for preplanning.

Benefits

- 20% cost savings in the field
- Achieved 100% preplan targets
- 21st century preplanning solution for the department

Monterey Fire Department saves over 20% on preplanning their fire district, significantly improving quality and consistency of preplans across six stations, and achieving NFPA standard for preplanning target hazards.

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- Brendan Connolly, Firefighter

Brendan Connolly joined the Monterey Fire Department six years ago, after spending ten years as a contractor in the city of Monterey on California’s Central Coast. Located on the southern edge of Monterey Bay, Monterey has a resident population of about 35,000, which can swell to upwards of 70,000 during special events like the Monterey Jazz Festival.

Two years after becoming a firefighter, Brendan volunteered to assist with the department’s preplanning program and soon took on a leadership role.

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- Brendan Connolly
Firefighter
Monterey

Municipal mergers make for preplanning grief

As a result of local mergers and consolidations of small municipal departments in 2008, 2011, and 2014, the Monterey Fire Department now comprises six stations with a total of 7 companies in the cities of Monterey, Pacific Grove, and Carmel-by-the Sea (a population of about 54,000). They respond to about 8,000 calls annually.

Before the merger, each station had its own preplanning system, and a different list of buildings that had to be done. When Brendan came into the program, it was the department’s first opportunity to take a serious look at standardizing and updating the preplanning process since the mergers.

Rethinking the process

The program committee got to work. “We looked at NFPA and ISO, which are the metrics we had at our disposal to determine the desirable (or at least the minimum required) level of preplanning we needed,” says Brendan. “ISO recommends that every commercial occupancy be inspected every year. We knew we were not going to achieve that initially, but that became our long-term objective. We knew we had to start somewhere—NFPA says you have to do a pre-incident survey of your target hazards every year.” This goal was more achievable, particularly because

the department had just re-established a target hazards list. The committee decided to start with that.

It was still an ambitious goal. “I knew I couldn’t do it alone,” says Brendan. “The seven companies from all three shifts in the department would have to help.” Their job would be to walk a building and mark up the existing paper preplans with corrections and updates. Brendan’s job would be to make the corrections on the computer using Microsoft Visio. He came up with a schedule for the visits and trained the companies on how the preplans were to be updated.

Program management becomes the bottleneck

The program got underway, and the companies were all submitting their preplans on time. So far, so good. Brendan soon found, however, that each preplan was taking him between 2 and 12 hours to update, over and above his regular work. He had become the bottleneck.

Brendan quickly realized things couldn’t go on like this. It had always been part of his overall plan to find software to help streamline the process, and so he now began his search. “The primary objective was choosing something that would enable every company to go out in the field and actually complete the

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“A Clear Decision”

Brendan reviewed the archives of Fire Engineering, scoured firefighting websites and forums, and attended trade shows. He found and even trialed some software, but for various reasons, it didn’t work out. In the end, it was his Chief who told him about APX and their SmartCapture application, and when he saw it, he knew he had found what he was looking for. “It was a clear decision,” he says. “It was easy.”

He especially liked the software’s user-friendliness. “SmartCapture offered a user interface that was firefighter-proof,” he laughs. “Anyone can use it. If you can use an iPhone, you can use SmartCapture. It’s an elegant tool for creating preplans.”

Brendan recalls that the roll-out was “...pretty straightforward. The licenses were turned on and I just started going around and doing some in-service training. We could have done it anywhere—at the fire station, out in front of the library, wherever.” The training itself didn’t take long. “About a 30-minute class for each company.”

APX customer support and flexible technology

Very quickly, Brendan started getting “really, really positive feedback” from the fire companies. He also got some constructive criticism—requests for changes

and additional functionality—which he passed on to APX.

“The response was really great. There was an honest appraisal of the amount of time it would take to execute the changes, but the updates that were requested were delivered when APX said they’d be, and even exceeded expectations. As a former contractor, I can tell you I really value and appreciate realistic timelines.”

APX customer support “was actually one of the most attractive things about APX, despite the user interface making it a shoe-in,” says Brendan. “I was really attracted to the notion that, because APX was a young company, we would have quite a bit of service at our disposal if we needed any changes. There were a couple of easy things we requested that were done within a day—new icons and more functionality.” Some more complex functions, such as the ability to add text boxes or highlight the outline of a building, took longer but came when APX promised they would. “For those, they said it would be Spring 2019, and that’s when they showed up.”

Targets Achieved

The Monterey FD are still in the first year of doing quarterly surveys, but by the end of the 3rd quarter of 2019, all of their target hazards will have been surveyed in APX. “This is something that—because of the challenges I had keeping up” says Brendan, “—we would not have accomplished

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For more information about the City of Monterey Fire Department, visit the website at <https://www.monterey.org/fire>

without the APX software.”

“With SmartCapture, a company can go out for two hours and get a really excellent preplan completed, and then they’re done for the quarter. And the feedback I’m getting is, ‘This is really easy!’”

Not only are they achieving their goals for the frequency of visits, but the quality and consistency of the preplans themselves have improved tremendously. From a mishmash of formats from six different stations, they now have uniformly formatted plans with the same level of detail and necessary information. “Even the fire hydrant icons look the same!” No longer do first responders have to stop and decipher a preplan in a format different from that to which they’re familiar.

Cost savings of 20%

Brendan says a conservative estimate is that SmartCapture has saved them 20% in program costs. “Even though in our previous budget allocation for preplanning we were using rudimentary tools that cost less than APX, it was still more expensive to do. It required more people hours, especially from the program manager. We also sometimes had to hire third-party consultants for drafting, and we had to spend money on stationery supplies for drawing and measuring and reproductions—all of that is costly.”

“The companies do this work while

they’re on duty, so that’s not a cost consideration. All the engines already had an iPad. We basically have just the software costs.”

A 21st Century Solution

Brendan, who describes himself as “not a techie,” says he has been frustrated by the state of technology for the last two decades. “I’ve been waiting 19 years for the promise of technology to start delivering with respect to integration and functionality. We’re finally starting to get there. The fire service has been slow to adopt tech, and in my opinion SmartCapture is one of the few recent opportunities where you’re seeing that functionality and integration.”

“This is preplanning for the 21st century, where a fire company can go out, spend time at the building with an iPad in hand, and have a completed preplan by the time they get back into the rig. The amount of time and energy saved, from just an administrative standpoint, is invaluable. There’s nothing else I need from SmartCapture. We’re there.”