DLAN

Adapting Pen and Paper Processes to the Digital World

Case Study: Amherst's Emergency Services & Safety Department Transition to Internet-Based Incident Management

Despite knowing that new technology is available that can reduce data entry, increase efficiency, and ensure full, legible records are secured, many organizations still rely on their standard pen and paper methods because they are familiar with them and know they work "well enough." They worry that new technology, might not fit exactly into their current workflow and will be hard to learn. Recently BCG had the opportunity to help the Emergency Services & Safety Department in Amherst, New York make the transition from their pen and paper record keeping methods to a fully digital, internet-based solution. Particularly BCG helped them to utilize the Erie County's Incident Management Software, DisasterLAN (DLAN), to record information about all of their fire and hazmat responses. The system, which is available to all cities, towns and municipalities for free through Erie County, will allow them to collect all of the needed information on each incident in one secure, common platform. First BCG staff members mapped out Amherst's current process and planned out how it could be mimicked within the software, then they configured the software to fit their particular workflow. Afterwards BCG continued to find more ways Amherst could utilize the software as part of their daily operations.

Identifying Current Practices That Can Be Improved By the Software

The first step to any transition is to identify exactly what current tasks could be improved by utilizing the software instead of the current process. Then a detailed game plan of precisely how the transition will be carried out can be produced. BCG Subject Matter Experts met with Amherst to discuss their current process and find areas for improvement. Amherst was using a number of paper hazard and safety forms to track and document inspections and issues. It was decided that this could be improved by creating designated areas for each year, any day-to-day fire or hazmat response conducted during that year could be recorded including all of the pertinent information about the event and the response to the event. Specifically, DLAN subject matter experts and safety coordinators for the town of Amherst produced the following plan:
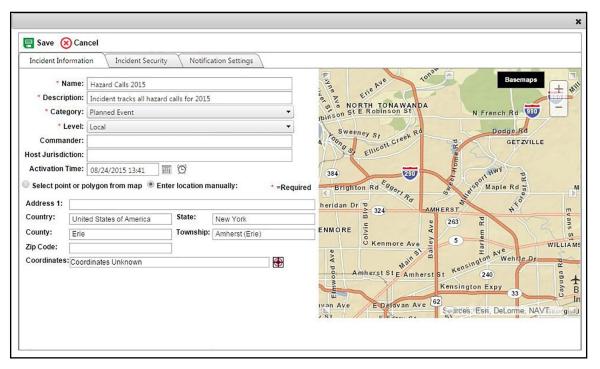
1. Each calendar year an incident will be created that serves as a bucket for any day to day fire or hazmat calls that occur.

2. All daily operations that include Fire or Hazmat responses will be stored in these incidents as tickets.

3. Ticket are entered anytime a hazmat or fire response is conducted. Alerts pertinent to the fire safety department are also logged in the ticket.

4. When tickets are being entered all relevant details including address data, images, and custom form data is associated with the call.

Turning Plans into Practice

The next step was to turn the plan into practice by creating the necessary incidents and ticket structures within DLAN. Using DLAN's standard administrative functions, an incident was created for 2015 for all hazard calls, this will serve as the bucket or folder for all the daily fire and hazmat calls encountered by the department within the year. Creating an incident is a very straightforward process, new incidents require a name, description, category, and severity level. Then simply save the incident allowing users from the fire safety office to log into the incident and begin entering, tracking and reporting on calls.
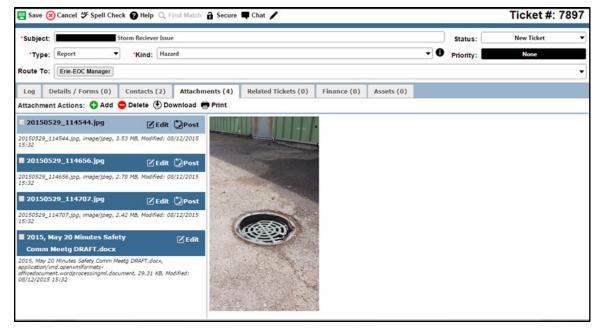

Testing the System

With the bucket in place to hold everything it was time for the true test, inputting, tracking and organizing actual issues that arise around the town. One of the first things to come up was a safety issue arising from a storm drain at a nearby parking lot that had begun to collapse. With a few simple clicks a new ticket was created in DLAN as soon as the hazard was reported. Entering tickets in this manner accomplishes a number of things all at once:

1. The ticket is time and date stamped allowing for easy identification days, weeks, or even years later.
2. The ticket is automatically associated with and stored into the incident, in this case storing it as a 2015 response.
3. An address can be added to the ticket to designate the hazard's reported location.
4. Tickets with geocoded addresses can be integrated with the system's built in Common Operational Picture.
5. Pictures can be included as attachments to tickets to further detail the hazard.

DisasterLAN Case Study

Once a system for tracking hazard and fire calls was in place the ground work was set for expanding the process by including other types of information collected on a regular basis. Another area that could be improved using DLAN was the process in which safety audits were documented. The system involved filling out forms before, during, and after the inspection creating a pile of paperwork that then needed to make it from the inspection site back to headquarters and into the correct file in a room full of filing cabinets. The process was cumbersome at best and could easily lead to important files being lost in the mix.

The first obstacle to tackle was transitioning the paper forms to electronic copies. To solve this existing forms were scanned and emailed to the technical specialist at BCG. Using the built in dynamic form builder, BCG staff were able to successfully replicate the paper forms in DLAN. Once the forms were in the system, users could easily attach the building work zone and OHSA forms to any tickets created to track inspections. The mobile friendly nature of DLAN, means this information can be entered directly into the system form the inspection site, decreasing the time needed to gather the information and eliminating the possibility of forms being lost in transit. This new system clearly simplified and improved the process of documenting safety audits.

Conclusion

When moving from pen and paper processes to digital solutions it is important to make the new process easy to learn and clearly in line with the current workflow of the organization. By meeting with the Amherst's Emergency Services & Safety Department, BCG staff members were able to clearly map out how the old process could be mimicked using the new software and configure the system accordingly. Once Amherst saw how easy it was to use DLAN and how it helped them improve their response, they were able to expand the use of the system from fire and hazmat responses to building inspections. As Amherst continues to use the system for daily operations, they will undoubtedly find new ways to utilize DLAN to improve their processes.