



CASE STUDY San Antonio Fire Department

San Antonio Fire Department Leverages Online Platform to Streamline Training Management

When the San Antonio Fire Department (TX) decided to move its old learning management system to something better, more modern, their selection of Vector Solutions' Learning Management System (Vector LMS)—formerly TargetSolutions—was the first step into a period of information, communication, and training enlightenment.

"It was a game-changer for us," said Captain Dean Watson, Training Coordinator for the San Antonio Fire Department. "Our old LMS was centralized in the Fire Training Division, and we had to rely on the Training Coordinator to pull reports."

Captain Watson said that before going to Vector LMS, the previous department LMS had a limited capacity and recorded just continuing education units. There wasn't the ability to capture training and share information in real-time with multiple groups.

"We were using the company logbook or a spreadsheet," said Captain Watson. "Vector LMS allows us to build and deliver training content; document individual, company, and battalion-level training; and make it all available to be seen by everyone without having a big paper trail."



Building Electronic Task Books in Vector LMS

The benefits of using this LMS extended throughout the entire San Antonio Fire Department. Presenting real-time information on multiple levels helped increase accountability in the department's training. Before, it was labor-intensive to create a comprehensive picture of what was being done. Now, the department can build material ranging from training for individual probationary firefighters to specialized training for companies at the battalion level based on information gained from after-action reports.

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Watson says the department is using its LMS to create electronic task books for probationary firefighters. With this online task book, a probationary firefighter can stay up on their training and documentation from any location. Their company officer can monitor their online progress and write reviews that can be seen by the battalion chief—all done without having to have the probationary firefighter, company officer, and battalion chief meet in person.

Going from a system that did not capture any non-vendor CE content training, San Antonio Fire Department can now deliver, track and report training with the new LMS.

Watson also reported they use the LMS to develop training using custom-made content. A most recent example is training on the COVID-19 pandemic. A simple training video can be turned into a training activity within the LMS where all personnel can be trained and all the training is documented.

Tracking Training & Compliance Online

Speaking to documentation, Watson said that they rely heavily on the LMS for ISO training. The department can pull specific training documents specific to ISO at any given moment. Additionally, when working with the Texas Commission on Fire Protection, a commission with heavy oversight and an active inspection of records, the department can quickly provide documentation on training and create specific reports for the commission.

Documenting training of new firefighters, Captain Watson says that Vector LMS allows for what he calls “documenting from cradle to retirement.” The LMS is used with NFPA standards, from firefighter to instructor, to ensure personnel are trained to the specific standard.

Multi-year tracks are used with BLS and ALS EMS training, allowing the department to maintain the required training and recertifications over several years for all their personnel.

As the Training Coordinator, Watson can now easily pull all the training, comprehensively, of any firefighter if needed, even suddenly, like if a firefighter is injured. Company officers and battalion chiefs can also use the wealth of training materials to generate reports and build training content.

Easily Produce Reports

With real-time reporting, a supervisor can set up the report's parameters, let it run for a specific period, and review the results to see where current training needs to be modified or if new training needs to be created. There is no time lost having to build the reports each time. The new LMS also acts as a repository for uploading files. Videos, photos, plans, and standard operating procedures, can all be added in a folder structure, replacing a physical library that would only exist in a permanent location.

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Watson said that the department is currently treating their pandemic training information this way, using the LMS as the central location for all the latest COVID-19 guidance that anyone in the department can access from anywhere. Along with the pandemic information, the department also stores the valuable information that comes out of large incidents after-action reports.

With all this information at their fingertips, Watson says the LMS allows for easy reporting, which can, in turn, lead back into department training. A company officer can run a report based on a certain time frame or a specific subject and create an actual training program. The department's special teams also benefit from this new LMS with their specific training scheduling and needs. Using LMS multi-year training for these teams can track what has been accomplished and keep personnel and supervisors on track for what is to come.

The Benefits of an Online LMS

A training plan can be set up and customized for the whole team's needs and its individual members. Firefighters and fire officers can see the plans and get ahead of deadlines so that the teams don't fall behind on certifications.

Having a robust LMS that isn't pinned down to one physical location has been a significant improvement in all aspects of training with the San Antonio Fire Department. From simple record keeping to tracking upcoming certifications for members of special teams, the investment in the LMS has made the administration of training data easy. Not only can any firefighter anywhere in the department access his or her personal records and progress in real-time, but the company and battalion-level officers can review the data and create training opportunities that might have otherwise been overlooked.

The ability to document, track, report, and customize, has made training in the San Antonio Fire Department more effective and, in turn, left the department with a constant real-time view of their state of readiness in preparing to respond to emergencies and train its firefighters.