



CASE STUDY

West Pierce Fire & Rescue

Customized Training Program Easily Tracks 39,000+ Training Hours

About an hour south of Seattle, Washington, West Pierce Fire & Rescue (WPFR) provides suppression, extraction, and special ops rescue (collapse, ropes, water, boat, etc.) for Lakewood and University Place, plus contracted emergency services to the Town of Steilacoom. The department's 145 career firefighters operate out of 6 stations to service the area's 100,000+ residents.

Since 2010, the department has been using Vector Solutions' online learning management system, [Vector LMS](#), to manage its comprehensive training program. In 2020 alone, WPFR firefighters completed 39,060 total training hours; all tracked through Vector LMS (formerly TargetSolutions).

Battalion Chief Matt Wagner (Fire Training Division) has been with WPFR for 17 years and understands how essential an effective training program is for his busy department. He shared how blended learning (combining online and in-person training) and pre-learning (exposing learners to new concepts/tools ahead of hands-on training) help keep the division on track. On the value of incorporating an online learning platform for fire services into his training program, he said, "With our call volume, we have to use online training. You can't keep half a shift in a room for four hours. You're getting toned out every 15 minutes."

Tailored Training Program Impresses Washington Survey and Rating Bureau (WSRB)

Similar to [ISO](#), the Washington Survey and Rating Bureau (WSRB) is an independent rating bureau that evaluates a community's property risk factors and is driven by the area's fire services fire-defense capabilities. The findings are often an essential component for setting fire insurance premiums for residents.



To meet regulatory compliance, certification requirements, and WSRB standards, West Pierce Fire & Rescue has organized its training program around WSRB's benchmarks, with its main topics broken out into the following training categories:

- Officer Development
- Tech Rescue
- Driver Operator
- Hazardous Materials
- EMS
- Recruit Training
- Water Rescue
- Fire Suppression

"WSRB will come in and audit our training records every 1-2 years," Chief Wagner shared. "I can just generate a report in Vector Solutions, give them what they want, and they're out the door." A much different experience from the stacks of handwritten rosters and physical paperwork WSRB often receives. Chief Wager added, "The fact that I can print all the requested information out in an Excel spreadsheet and hand it over is great. They love it!"

Making Firefighting More Accessible With Self-Paced Online Learning

In support of the department's Recruitment and Retention Team and Equity Team, focused on equity and empowerment, all personal and professional development hours are tracked on the platform.

Chief Wagner spoke about how his department is working hard to reduce firefighting entry barriers by recruiting inexperienced individuals. He said, "We just hired 12 new full-time firefighters, most with little to no volunteer experience and no EMS experience, which means they have to be trained through EMS school and firefighter academy. We want to help break down barriers for people who may not have had the opportunity to volunteer or get EMT certifications."

The department also uses the LMS to support firefighters' interests outside of required fire and EMS training by providing access to additional [online courses](#) outside of the curriculum, including specialized training around various topics, like ARFF or wildland training. "If someone was interested in something specific that was not assigned, they can search and self-assign a course and still get credit for those hours," Chief Wagner reported.

Custom Content Saves Time without Compromising Training Quality

Custom Training Videos

Another use of the LMS that has been valuable for West Pierce Fire & Rescue is developing custom training videos for the platform. Management often provides recorded how-to/instructional videos around new equipment or updated SOGs to ensure standardization across every shift and every firefighter. Video demonstrations mean every member gets the exact same training. "We'll get a new saw that we've never used. Before everyone gets hands-on practice, we'll put a video on the platform with how to start, operate, and maintain it," shared Chief Wagner. "We'll add it to the bulletin board for everyone to see when they log in. We then create an activity around the video and assign it to members as required training."

Custom training videos are not only helpful for delivering consistent training, but they also prevent management from having to pull members from 6 different stations, across 3 shifts, between calls to provide new information. Instead, firefighters watch the training videos ahead of time and come prepared for hands-on practice. Chief Wagner added, "It's a great communication tool, and everything gets tracked. I can run a report and instantly know who hasn't completed the assignment."

Custom Credentials

WPFR developed several credentials, comprised of related training components, to easily organize, assign, track, and report on key training categories. Like the High-Risk SOG custom credential which is assigned and completed every year. It contains critical guidelines around the department's most dangerous responsibilities, such as fire ground activities and freeway response.

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Custom Tests

"The test builder feature is awesome," stated Chief Wagner. "Firefighters used to have to write out their answers long-hand, and the supervisor correcting the 100-question test had to grade them one at a time manually."

Vector LMS enables West Pierce Fire & Rescue to automate test-taking. With paper tests added to the platform, the department can easily assign a test to firefighters and set a time limit. Once completed, the system instantly grades the test and records the results, providing valuable insight into testing outcomes at the individual and department levels. Chief Wagner explained, "I was easily able to take the test and built it out on the platform. Assign it with a time frame for when it's available, and it gets graded automatically. It's great!"

Custom Training Academy

The Red Knights Fire Academy is WPFR's in-house recruit academy. The department built a custom activity within the platform for its 450-hour recruit training curriculum, covering Firefighter 1, Firefighter 2, HAZMAT Ops, and HAZMAT Awareness. All activities are contained within the custom academy category for recruits to complete, and every training hour is tracked and reportable.

Streamlining the "Act-Up" Process with Electronic Recordkeeping

When it comes to tracking required training for advancing to the next level in firefighting, Chief Wagner emphasized, "We tell them, if it isn't put into Vector LMS, it didn't happen." Any firefighter looking to "act-up" to the next rank must complete the classes required and submit the certificate of completion to leadership to be added to Vector LMS. Certificates are then scanned and placed into a folder under their name for easy reference. Once all requirements are met, leadership can quickly and easily perform a search to see if the member is eligible to "act-up".

Utilizing the platform to track promotions speeds up the process, increases accountability, and reduces liability exposure with electronic records that affirm requirements have been completed for any firefighters' position.

Tracking Beyond Required Training to Support Special Initiatives

West Pierce Fire & Rescue utilizes the platform to track more than just required firefighting training. Its Honor Guard uses Vector LMS to track how many times they meet a year. Members are required to attend a certain number of events and trainings per year to stay on the team. The platform is used to track their participation.