

Increasing Code Enforcement Efficiency and Time in Field with Web Software

The Benefits of Implementing Code Enforcement Software



Code enforcement departments across the country are experiencing the pressures of limited resources and rapidly increasing caseload. While budgets in many city and county departments can support only a limited number of officers, local populations are increasing dramatically and with them, resulting caseload. Officers and their management urgently need software tools to address their administrative needs, make them more effective and increase the time they are able to spend in the field. Wireless, specialized code enforcement software is an ideal answer and increases local governments' ability to increase violation revenue collections and citizen compliance.

Increased Department Staff Efficiency

Code enforcement departments may consist of several officers covering a congested and growing metropolitan area or a single officer covering an extensive, rural area. In both cases, officers express frustration that their time in the field is often limited due to the need to do administrative work in the office. After visiting a site to investigate a complaint, they often need to return to the office to schedule follow-up visits. While in the field, they may find violations but need to return to the office to generate violation notices. Tracking and reporting of cases recorded on paper is extremely difficult and impossible to review for closure consistency or workflow reallocation.

Increased Service for Citizens

Citizens in the community use technology in their homes and workplaces and increasingly expect to be able to file a code complaint online or check on the status of a prior request. It may be difficult to understand an officer's inability to access updated case data or ensure that most updated violation code is being used. Citizens are becoming increasingly sophisticated and expect more from government agencies funded with tax dollars. They expect efficient case resolution and case processing resulting in violators being held accountable and collections that replenish government coffers and ease local budgetary woes.

Increased Revenue, Court Processing and Collections

Courts are tasked with processing an increasing number of code violation cases as communities grow and the numbers of structures increase. Cases filed that contain incomplete information or that are filed in an inconsistent manner or without supporting documentation are likely to slow down overall caseload processing by the courts. The result is inefficient court processing and lower than expected violation collections.

Increased Compliance

When citizens are aware of their local code, they are able to ensure that they maintain proper conformance and even act as the eyes and ears of code enforcement for fellow citizens. Constituents can be easily informed via city website and they should be able to submit their own requests from home and check on case progress. When residents of a city or county believe they are informed and kept abreast of their local codes, they are more likely to choose to be part of the solution in maintaining their community.

Increasing Staff Effectiveness

Access to Live Data in Field

It's obvious why an officer's access to live data in the field is the most crucial component of an administrative code enforcement software solution. While the officer is reviewing a case in the field, he should also be able to reference code violation numbers, view past and related violations, file updates and communicate with other officers. Access to data simplifies administration, saves time and increases accuracy.

Ability to Print Activity Reports in Field

Activity reports are crucial to officers and managers to plan daily activities, delegate workload and ensure that cases are processed in a consistent manner. The ability to print an updated activity report in the field frees officers from the need to return to the office when task lists are updated and cases are reprioritized.

Ability to Schedule Follow-up Visits in Field

Officers meeting with constituents are most effective when they can schedule follow-up visits on the spot. The best assurance that an offender will take a violation seriously comes with the officer's ability to conclude a visit with a firm and mutually agreed upon future date for resolution. Without this ability to schedule the next visit during the current visit, potential for additional delay is introduced.

GIS Integration

When officers travel to violation sites, clear knowledge of the site's location shown on a map using GIS software is a sure time saver. Addresses may be verified before the trip is made and city, county and regional maps may be cross-referenced. GIS integration also allows violations to be tracked by district, area and parcel number.

Automated Case Management

Code enforcement officers' most common frustration is that they simply do not have enough time to manage the administration work around their case load. Specialized software is cited by users as a type of "administrative assistant." Automated case management features such as auto-assignment, auto-reminders and case and task reassignment when officers are away all save significant time and ensure consistent case processing. Automated administration frees officers to become more strategic and productive, resulting in improved use of well-trained and expensive human resources for the community.

Centralized Data and Process Standardization

The ability to cross-reference cases easily, assign subsequent tasks and communicate within the application so that all related activities are recorded as part of a case is invaluable. Officers can review other related cases, how cases were processed in the past, supporting related documentation in other cases, and even cases filed by citizens or about properties with other department agencies. Centralized data with a secure and well-maintained source enables agencies to cross-reference cases and procedures to realize overall internal and inter-departmental efficiencies.

Software Specifically for Code Enforcement

Designed by Officers and Supervisors

Code enforcement officers and supervisors are uniquely expert in the functionality needed to support their jobs. Most software marketed to these departments is actually re-worked commercial software that must be altered for use by departments. Only software designed for public agencies and specifically for code enforcement departments should be seriously considered for implementation. Many clients of Comcate Code Enforcement Manager software turn to this vendor after already implementing software that was not designed for their needs. Comcate Code Enforcement Manager software was designed by code enforcement officers and supervisors and includes functionality needed exclusively by this group of users.

Release Functionality Directed by Client Base

Many software vendors determine functionality and future enhancements in order to maximize profits. In the government sector and especially in code enforcement, it is imperative that functionality be determined by users. Comcate is unique in its client focus. Comcate clients have a direct line of communication with company executives and a strong role in determining product enhancements. Comcate clients are extremely loyal and consider their relationship a partnership they can trust.

Customized Reporting Functionality

Reporting capabilities are essential to good code enforcement and management. The ability to generate reports on demand that are organized by day, officer, case, code, resolution time and location are all important to understanding trends, issues and justifying funding. Comcate software has extensive and customizable reporting capabilities that are well known in the industry.

Web Software Savings: Administration, Hardware, Upgrades, Uptime

Small and mid-size code enforcement departments are often strapped for funding but desire the functionality that large city departments enjoy. The web software model is perfect for this situation. Clients of web software vendors access the software via the internet (wireless in automobiles) and do not need to invest in extra software, hardware or administrative staff to support the application. Comcate hosts its software on a secure server with guaranteed uptime and non-intrusive upgrades. The vendor's savings in not doing local upgrades is passed on to their clients.

Customized Implementations and Training

Many vendors today rely on third party integrators to perform software implementation and training for them. Once the client purchases software, communication with the vendor is over and a third party, often not familiar with code enforcement or even public agencies performs a standard installation and deliver non-customized training to clients they do not know. Comcate implementation and training is delivered exclusively by very experienced Comcate employees that genuinely care about keeping clients satisfied. Comcate clients consistently rate their training and customer service as excellent.

Ease of Use

Code enforcement officers and management don't have extra time to learn new applications. Comcate software is designed with intuitive ease of use as a primary driving factor. Users almost always are able to completely utilize the software after a brief training session and often say that the software so easy to use that future new employees use it without training. Functionality designed by the user, customized implementation and training all serve to make Comcate software proficiency easy to attain. Most functions are available at a simple click of a button.

Case Studies: Web Code Enforcement Software in Action

Del Norte County, CA

The County of Del Norte in northwestern California contains over 1200 square miles to be covered by a single Code Enforcement Officer. Officer Dave Mason felt that he needed to be effective with every minute of his time and wanted to upgrade from his paper based case management system. Del Norte looked at software options to increase administrative efficiency and chose Comcate Code Enforcement Manager. Officer Mason is now able to access live data in the field, print notices from his car and schedule follow-up visits while in the field.

St. George, UT

As in many code enforcement organizations, the staff in the St. George, Utah Code Enforcement Department was becoming overwhelmed by the number of cases generated daily, struggling to maintain accuracy and availability of case information by manually updating spreadsheets with the latest case details. Reporting on case status and closures was difficult and time-consuming and there was limited ability to report on specific districts, areas or specific categories of interest. The code enforcement department in St. George, Utah, selected Comcate CEM for its remarkable ease of use and ability to generate custom reports.

Marco Island, FL

The Code Enforcement Department in Marcos Island, Florida found that activity resulting from storm related damage and cleanup had become overwhelming for their case management software that was not originally designed for code enforcement activities. They looked to Comcate for a state of the art solution that could be easily and quickly implemented and would contain all their historical case information. Chief of Code Compliance, Eric Wordle said, "Comcate managed the entire implementation process and even migrated our legacy data over. We had all our old, active, and open cases in the Comcate application on day one. The transition was very easy!"

Rushville, IN

In 2005, the Rushville, Indiana, Code Enforcement Department was established to perform activities that had previously been done by multiple departments and new technology was purchased that would enhance the department's efficiency as quickly as possible. Officers in Rushville's new Code Enforcement Department selected Comcate to access live data in the field, generate notices at the click of a button, print daily field reports, schedule follow-up inspections, and review customized activity reports with case aging.

Morrow, GA

The Morrow, Georgia, Code Enforcement Department consists of only a single officer who needed technological assistance to manage the caseload. Morrow implemented Comcate's wireless code enforcement software. Morrow Code Enforcement Officer Marti Tracy said, "Less than a month after implementation, Comcate's Code Enforcement Manager Software had paid for itself through the Court's approval of requested fines."

Conclusion

Comcate's Code Enforcement Manager software is unique in its ease of use, design by code enforcement professionals and ability to deliver both the cost advantages of web software with the functionality uniquely desired by code enforcement officers and managers. Comcate's extensive and satisfied customers consistently speak of its contribution to their productivity; time spent in the field and increased collections and compliance rates.

Comcate, Inc. is the leading provider of customer relationship management request tracking software for public agencies, with over 150 agreements signed to implement Comcate's solutions. For more information on Comcate software products, please email info@comcate.com.