With Video Collaboration, Lincoln Fire and Rescue Saves Lives and Sees a 66 Percent Increase in Training Efficiency

Industry

- Public Safety, Fire and Rescue

Customer Use

- Morning calls: 14 stations plus headquarters
- Face-to-face remote training
- Post-incident critiques
- Organizational meetings
- Coordinated response to disasters

Polycom® RealPresence® Solutions

- High-definition room environments in 14 firehouses and at Lincoln headquarters
- Universal collaboration, including departmental bridges united via virtualization management
- Firewall traversal enabling secure collaboration with external parties
- Recording and streaming solutions for capturing and delivering training content
- Desktop and mobile software

Benefits

- Minimize response times by keeping firefighters in stations during meetings and training
- Reduce transport-related costs
- Recapture one week of management time each month
- Reduce time required to deliver training content by up to 66 percent
- Save crews 3 hours of driving per training session
- Improve command and control during emergencies

Overview

Every morning in Lincoln, Nebraska, as many as 85 firefighters meet face-to-face to discuss the day's operations, anticipate potential traffic delays, and share plans for training, maintenance, and other business. The morning meeting lets on-duty staff at all of Lincoln's 14 fire stations hear directly from Lincoln Fire and Rescue leaders and ask them questions as they arise. They can be briefed efficiently, often in just 15 minutes. And because they never leave their firehouses, even during training they can still reach the scene of most fires in just three minutes.

Lincoln's secret weapon is a rapidly expanding video collaboration network. In just a few months, it has become a crucial communication backbone allowing the emergency services agency to cut costs, reduce travel across town for meetings and training, recapture a week of management time every month, cultivate a more flexible and efficient environment that improves training efficiency by 66 percent, and streamline the way it protects and serves the citizens of Lincoln.

A model for video collaboration success

Municipalities of all sizes are struggling to crack the code to delivering exceptional service at a time when budgets are tight and demands on city resources have never been greater. For many of these cities, Lincoln offers a model for success as it realizes efficiencies in the firehouse and beyond.

"We could not start our day without the regular Polycom call. It's that critical."

Leo Benes, Battalion Chief, Lincoln Fire and Rescue, Lincoln, Nebraska

A crucial morning video call

Lincoln Fire and Rescue dispatches fire, rescue and Emergency Medical Services personnel from Lincoln's 14 fire stations, where high-definition video collaboration systems are located in firehouse kitchens and common areas. At 7:15 each morning, on-duty staff use the systems to virtually attend operational meetings and schedule reviews.

"We could not start our day without the regular video call," says Leo Benes, Battalion Chief. "It's critical."

Benes says the morning video meeting gives everyone on duty a chance to be briefed on what to expect, from construction delays to fugitive sightings. "We recently had reason to believe an armed criminal suspect had fled to Lincoln," recalls Benes. "We were able to show our providers his photo so they'd know what to look for and what to do if they saw him. Our crews saw it before any of the news outlets had it."

66 percent improvement in training efficiency

Video collaboration has become just as vital for training, Benes says. Prior to deploying the video network, firefighters had to travel to department headquarters to attend class, forcing neighboring stations to cover their territory while they were out.

"A fire can double in size in 30 seconds, which means we can't afford to have officers out of service for mandated training," says Benes. "Our video communications keep firefighters where they're most needed—in the station."

Jamie Pospisil, the agency's firefighter training manager, was initially doubtful about video's ability to replace in-person classes. She changed her mind after a house fire broke out a block from a fire station where a crew was taking a class over video. "In the past, that crew would have been 20 minutes away from their service area," Pospisil says. "Honestly, this sold me on using video collaboration for training."

Pospisil is equally sold on the time savings. She recently wrapped up a course on high-rise firefighting, delivering it over video to all crews at all 14 stations. It took her a month to train all the crews, whereas previously Pospisil would have needed three months to train everyone in person—a 66 percent reduction in training time. Video training also saves three crews an hour of roundtrip driving each.

The department achieves further efficiencies by using advanced recording and streaming solutions to capture training sessions so firefighters can always review classes, meetings and other video calls during their downtime. "If people are absent, they can watch the recorded class later, and their experience is consistent with everyone else's," said Truck Company 8 Captain Shawn Mahler. "This is quality, hands-on instruction delivered via videoconferencing."

Always ready for the next call

For public safety organizations like Lincoln Fire and Rescue, response time is everything. "Our average response time is three minutes or less when officers are in quarters," says Benes. "We managed to maintain it even before we had the video network, but it's a lot easier now."

For Engine Company 8 Captain Brian Giles, the operational benefits are obvious. "It would be logistically impossible to take 85 people out of their service areas and bring them to one rally point," Giles says. "But with videoconferencing we can touch all those people while they remain in their stations."

Using the network also spares supervisors from having to drive downtown for meetings. "The other day we met over video and we each saved 45 minutes to an hour just in roundtrip travel," recalls Benes. "There were six people who'd have driven to the meeting, so we reclaimed six hours—nearly a full man day—of time. Across a typical month and all participants, that would easily add up to a full week of time we're reclaiming."

Then there are travel expenses, including fuel and vehicle wear and tear. "Over time, we expect the cost savings will help us get more done within a tight budget," says Benes. "For now, we're focusing on the beneficial impact video is having on our operations, readiness, and response time."

Now Lincoln's emergency services departments are investigating how more mobile devices in the field could enable incident commanders to remotely gain real-time assessments during wide scale disasters. "When you're on scene, you're caught up in the moment and you're on overload," says Benes. "But if you can see what's happening in real time back in the station, you can make decisions based on a broader understanding of the incident. Should you escalate the response? Deploy more resources? Capturing video from inside our command vehicles would help us make those decisions."

Beyond emergency services

Video collaboration is also delivering efficiencies in other areas of Lincoln's city and county government. Lancaster County is saving $40,000 per courtroom by outfitting courts with tablets equipped with mobile video collaboration software. By connecting courtrooms and jail facilities, the county is reducing the cost and risk of offender transports while streamlining arraignments, bail hearings, expert testimonies, and other proceedings. City administrators also save time and money by interviewing job candidates and interacting with other agencies.

For budget-crunched municipalities everywhere, Lincoln's vision offers a way forward. "Anything that cuts costs and saves time is huge for us," says Benes. "That's why this network is so important."

About Polycom

Polycom is the global leader in open standards-based unified communications and collaboration (UC&C) solutions for voice and video collaboration, trusted by more than 415,000 customers around the world. Polycom solutions are powered by the Polycom® RealPresence® Platform, comprehensive software infrastructure and rich APIs that interoperate with the broadest set of communication, business, mobile and cloud applications and devices to deliver secure face-to-face video collaboration in any environment.

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