



Central Stickney (IL) Fire Protection District

Central Stickney Fire Protection District traces its roots to a volunteer fire department, founded in 1945 to protect an unincorporated neighborhood smack in the middle of Cook County, the second most populated county in America, and just a few blocks north of Chicago's Midway International Airport.

The area -- home to about 4,700 people who reside in a four- by eight-block residential tract -- is bounded by I-55 on the north and 51st Street on the south, Harlem and Cicero avenues to the east and west, and includes a large industrial sector on its west side. The population more than doubles on weekdays when laborers flood into jobs at a large packing house, chemical- and metal fabrication facilities, and a large railyard.

Chief Brian McMahon also works full-time as a Chicago Fire Department firefighter, assigned to the Englewood neighborhood, about six miles southeast of Central Stickney. "We're a stepping-stone for many to move on to full-time departments elsewhere," he said.

Central Stickney is a diverse community, rich with ethnic culture.

A year or so ago, when fire officials heard some 9-1-1 calls for Central Stickney were being delayed by glitches in routing between Cook County and the City of Chicago, McMahon sent a letter to community residents, urging them to program CSFPD's emergency number directly into their phones. His message went out in three languages: English, Spanish, and Polish.

When CSFPD took delivery on a near \$1 million, 107-foot Pierce Ascendant Aerial ladder truck last June, they hosted a "Blessing & Push-In Ceremony." Neighbors were invited to christen the rig with township officials and the local Catholic priest.

McMahon says he wanted to solve two problems when he went searching for a digital scheduling solution: "Our scheduling was a mess, with no way to keep up with trades, and our forms and documentation were nothing but clutter and ineffective."

"Aladtec solved both problems by giving us a live scheduling program, easy to use by officers and members, and a form (application) that have eliminated all our paper forms. "I feel there is no going back now. We are hooked."

"I knew Evergreen Park Fire was using a (different scheduler). I took a look at that and got a price from them. Then I learned Roberts Park was using Aladtec. I started researching the two of them. It seemed like Aladtec had a bunch of videos out there. It was very well

Department Info:

Roster: 40 part-time firefighters and paramedics.

Calls: about 1,000 in 2017.

Service area: Approx. Four sq. miles, pop. approx. 4,700 -- which doubles during the workday.

Apparatus: 1 engine, 1 ladder, 2 ambulances, 1 squad, command vehicle, and two support vehicles.

Special Challenges: About half CSFPD's coverage area is comprised of heavy industrial and chemical facilities including steel fabrication, aluminum extrusion, a large packing company, and two specialty coating and adhesives manufacturers. Also, a large railroad hub, a Metra rail line, and auto-response to I-55, the route connecting western suburbs to downtown Chicago.

Special skills: HazMat, ALS Engines and Ambulances.

Aladtec users since early 2018

Neighboring agencies also using Aladtec:

Burbank Fire Dept., Burbank; Berwyn Fire Dept. Berwyn; Hometown Fire Protection Dist. Hometown; Roberts Park Fire Protection Dist., Justice; Forest Park Fire Dept., Forest Park; North Palos Fire Protection Dist., Palos Hills; West Suburban Consolidated Dispatch Ctr., River Forest; ... plus 20 more.

advertised. When I saw the difference between (the two) where the (competitor) just does your schedule and that's it, whereas Aladtec did the schedule as well as the forms and things like that. I was able to kill two birds with one stone."

Previously, Central Stickney used Excel spreadsheets.

"We had a pre-printed form for avails, then that fell to the wayside with the advent of e-mail and texting. Staff would e-mail the guy doing the schedule with their preferences. He'd put them in order of seniority, and then sit down and start filling it out, trying to keep track of each guy and how many shifts they had -- to keep it even. He would type it into an Excel spreadsheet, then print it and post it all over the firehouse. It was impossible to keep up with, with all the trades, and changes, and giveaways and all that."

"I'd walk in in the morning not knowing who was here. It just got too crazy, so one day I said 'That's it. We're done with this. I need a scheduling program so I can see in real-time, who's doing the trades, when they're working and when they're not.'"

McMahon's real "ah-HA" moment came when he realized Aladtec's Scheduled Time Report would save him hours each month assembling figures for payroll.

"As long as we stay on top in the program, meaning all trades, even two-hour holdovers and stuff like that, I can go to Scheduled Time Report, create a group or Firefighters or Paramedics, and that does my payroll for me."

McMahon used to use another software to do the payroll. Hours and various exceptions were entered and at month-end, the program would print out 30 pages.

"Sitting down at the computer for one hour, going through each employee and printing out a sheet for each employee, this saves another hour just for that. Aladtec techs helped me create the custom views for shift commander, firefighter-driver, firefighter-paramedics, so I click on that, make sure the date-range is correct -- and I print one sheet of paper."

CSPFD has a lot of forms in their system: AED Operators Checklist, After-Incident Turnout Gear Cleaning Form, Daily Ambulance AM & PM Checkouts, Fire EMS Inventory, Monthly Medication Inventory, and an extensive inspection form for the newest ladder truck.

McMahon built most of them himself, in some cases, working from sample forms Aladtec has pre-loaded on the platform.

Another form he created was a "Commendation Record" form.

"We have a Christmas party at the end of the year. There was one year, I gave out like two awards. The following week, people are banging on my door, saying -- 'What the hell? You gave him a commendation for this, and what about the kid that I pulled out?' and I'm like, 'What are you talking about? I don't remember that?' This was my way of remembering. 'You think someone deserves a commendation, you tell ME!'"

"Work orders are a great asset as well because now I can look and see, who wrote it up, why'd they write it up? I can go back and see, did we actually fix the problem?" Previously, firefighters would jot equipment issues on a dry-erase board, put a yellow tag on the out-of-service item and put it on the back shelf.

CSPFD recently ordered a unique wash system for their apparatus.

"There's been a lot of discussion out in the world about frame rails rotting out, and one of their comments back to (clients) is that the frame rails are warrantied against manufacturer's defects. While, rotting away, in my mind, is a defect, but in their minds, they're saying, how did you care for it? We bought this undercarriage washer, and that's going to be added to the Aladtec vehicle maintenance report to assure ongoing documentation -- 1000 PSI, front-to-back. Five years from now, if one of my frame rails rots out, we're going to be able to say, 'Here's the documentation on when we did it and how we did it.'"

Aladtec's Mandatory Message tool allows leaders to communicate directly with individuals or groups, and document that their message has been read.

"I actually love that," said McMahon, mousing through his Aladtec system. "The last one -- there are still four people who haven't read it yet..."

"Like today, we had one of our vehicles in which the siren went out. There are two sirens in the vehicle. 'If you can't use this one, you gotta use that one.' I just sent out a message. It's no big deal, but it says, 'Hey. The floor-pedal siren is out-of-service. You need to use the box over your head...' I'm not really worried about that. I sent the text out, and I'm good."

Other recent messages dealt with proper use of department vehicles and ambulance billings.

"I like the fact that I send out the message and it's 'Required'. I have documentation that the firefighters have read and understand it," said McMahon.



Brian McMahon

Chief Brian McMahon joined Central Stickney Fire in 1997 as a part-time paramedic. He was promoted to Chief in 2008. McMahon also holds a full-time job as a firefighter with the Chicago Fire Dept., working from a station in the Englewood neighborhood.