

Orange County Fire Rescue Department

Case Study, Orlando, Florida



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– Bill Godfrey, Deputy Chief of Training and Information Technology

Making emergency response training safe yet realistic

Searing flames shoot out the windows of a burning house and sirens wail as fire trucks race to the scene. Firefighters leap out of their trucks only to discover the fire hydrant, the closest water source, isn't working.

This is the type of high-pressure situation the incident commander of a fire station deals with every day. His job is to manage the entire emergency situation and the department's overall response to a fire. But learning to be an incident commander through on-the-job training can be difficult and dangerous, says Bill Godfrey, deputy chief of training and information technology at the Orange County Fire Rescue Department (OCFRD). Fires and emergencies are unpredictable, so incident commanders need to learn specific skills that will help them anticipate and plan for what might arise on any given day.

Safety through simulation

With over 900 firefighters on staff and 86,269 emergency calls handled in 2004 alone, the OCFRD had to make hands-on training widely available without putting lives at risk. So the department created an incident command simulator using a SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard and CommandSim™ software.

The new simulator enables the training department to run 30-minute simulations with scenarios focused on teaching particular skills and dealing with specific problems. Simulations include missing fire crews, a broken-down fire engine or multiple victims. Participants practice and improve their response skills with each scenario in a setting that feels real, but puts no one in danger.

Realistic and effective training

“We want firefighters to get immersed in their roles. We want them to feel like they're really on an emergency scene. In real emergencies, there's no interacting with a computer, there's no keyboard, there's no sitting down, there's no mouse. The only way to get that kind of realism is with the interactive whiteboard,” says Godfrey.

“During a simulation, it's very important that people believe they're in an emergency incident because we want them to behave like it's the real thing.”

Challenge

Create an incident command simulator to avoid the dangers of on-the-job training

SMART Solution

SMART Board interactive whiteboard used with CommandSim software

Result

Incident commanders can train in a safe and realistic setting

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Firefighters feel like they are really on an emergency scene using the SMART Board interactive whiteboard during incident command simulations.

At the beginning of a simulation, the incident commander-in-training stands alone in the simulator room listening to department radio transmissions. His view of the incident is projected on a SMART Board interactive whiteboard. Using CommandSim software, he sees a 3-D world that he can navigate by touching the screen.

“We want [firefighters] to think and feel like they're really on an emergency scene... The only way to get that kind of realism is with the interactive whiteboard.”

Eight to twelve people, including lieutenants of individual fire engines or members of special rescue teams, work with the incident commander. Each person talks to the incident commander and participates in the incident. Afterward, the group critiques what went right or wrong during the simulation.

Ready to respond

“Until this simulator was created, there was no practical way for people to be taught or practice incident command, with the exception of on-the-job training,” says Godfrey.

“During a simulation, it's very important that people believe they're in an emergency incident because we want them to behave like it's the real thing. With the large screen, we can help them really get into that role. We couldn't do that if every 30 seconds they had to bend over and click a mouse.”

Godfrey says the incident command simulator has helped train staff to deal with crisis situations safely and knowledgeably, a goal every fire department strives to achieve.

About SMART

SMART is both the industry pioneer and global market leader in easy-to-use interactive whiteboards and other group collaboration tools. SMART products include the family of award-winning SMART Board interactive whiteboards, interactive pen displays, interactive digital signage and software. Using SMART products, groups can access and share the information they need to meet, teach, train and present. SMART customers include NASA, British Telecom, BMW, the Los Angeles Lakers, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Disney Imagineering and Harvard University. SMART products are sold through dealers across North America and distributors worldwide.



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