



SUCCESS STORY

SOUTHBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Find out more about Field Services

Doing More with Data: How One Water Utility Improved Service Levels and Lowered Hydrant Replacement Costs

With a population of over 17,000 people, the water department of Southbridge, Massachusetts has plenty of expertise in delivering water services. For over 30 years, it has been co-ordinating a complex water and wastewater system supporting both municipal and industrial facilities across the northeastern area.

Unsurprisingly, maintaining and repairing such a complicated system generates plenty of data, however, with an outdated and largely manual asset management process, the Southbridge water utility team felt their data could be working harder. In fact, managing its assets was becoming increasingly difficult thanks to paper-based administrative systems and legacy databases.

With these issues front of mind, the department invested in AMCS Field Services asset management, an innovative software solution designed to streamline data collection, improve reporting and boost productivity. Today it is used to monitor a range of assets, including over 700 hydrants and 100 miles of water main, utilising key data to improve service levels and lower asset replacement costs.

Steve Gregoire, Manager at Southbridge, explained how a more efficient approach to data handling has helped his team to improve water quality and keep facilities in compliance.

Eliminating Paper-Based Systems

Before working with AMCS Field Services, the town of Southbridge used a highly manual process to schedule work, collect data, and plan its asset management activities. Across the utility, data handling and work activities consisted of a combination of Excel, paper, and legacy databases.

"Our previous work order system was very old school," recalled Steve Gregoire. The town of Southbridge, he

explained, was originally working from a paper-based database. This required a print-out of a work order; a hand-off to a field tech to do the work, fill out the order and return it to the office; then a hand-over to a secretary to type into the computer.

"That was as far as it went," said Steve. "It wasn't a good system for accessing historical records. You couldn't easily discover, for example, what work was done on a specific hydrant in the last three years. It was very difficult to find that out. The only way to access that information was to talk to the secretary.

"Another example is that a lot of our gate valve maintenance scheduling was done on a paper map. We'd actually take a map and highlight the street where work was being done. Consequently, we needed a more modern approach to record keeping and preventive maintenance."

AMCS Field Maintenance: Tailored for Utilities

"We reviewed at least six software solutions," said Gregoire. "However, we went with AMCS Field Services, formerly known as Utility Cloud, because it's specifically tailored for utility systems. Most of the asset management programs out there can be customized but AMCS Field Services is already made for water and wastewater utilities. It could already do what we needed without any customization at all."

As a result, Southbridge adopted AMCS Field Services in 2016, introducing its digital standard operating procedures and expanding its use over time. Today, the system is used to monitor a wide range of assets, including 2,200 valves, 700 hydrants, and 100 miles of water main, as well as within its 6-million-gallon water treatment plant.

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"AMCS Field Services has been a huge management aid for me," continued Steve. "It manages our preventive maintenance and testing programs and helps with the record-keeping side of things."

"We're also going to save valuable time down the road. If you're collecting better records now, and you have better access to those records, in five or ten years, when you need that historical data, it's going to pay a big dividend."

Saving Time, Reducing Costs and Improving Service Levels

Since utilising AMCS Field Services, Southbridge has streamlined its administrative processes, reducing the total time spent on reporting by 15 to 20% for an administrative manager. Not only that, the department has also reduced some individual processes such as backflow testing by as much as 40%.

As Steve Gregoire clarified, "AMCS Field Services has shifted the workload a little bit from the office to the field, but I think that's how it should have been all along. The technology just wasn't there and now it is."

"The guys in the field see the benefit. Before, they used to just scribble readings down on a piece of paper and throw it to the secretary saying, 'Enter this for me.' Now they understand that if they spend five minutes entering data on-site, it can save them time later on."

"Now they're able to retrieve information in the field where before they'd have to come back to the office to get a record or drawing. In fact, they can access a lot of the info they need on-site because we've set it up to work that way," explained Gregoire.

And the benefits don't stop there. Using the data pulled from the system, Southbridge has been able to extend the product life cycle of its fire hydrants and reduce the cost per hydrant

from \$5-7K to an astonishing \$1K. In correlation, Southbridge also has just 1 in 700 hydrants out of service, decreasing out-of-service levels in comparison to other towns who are up to 10-15%.

Delivering Operational Transparency

Thanks to its robust data analytics, AMCS Field Services has increased the department's capacity to allocate resources efficiently, rejuvenating their capability to keep within budget. That means whatever awaits the town of Southbridge in the future, AMCS Field Services will be there to help them along the way.

Reflecting on the department's ability to do more with its data, Steve concluded,



"I now have a much better connection to what's happening out in the field. Previously, if I didn't talk to people directly and go hunt down the information, I didn't always know what was going on. Now, through accurate and streamlined data capture, I have a really good feel for what's going on in the system, and how we're progressing with our work. I wouldn't be without it – AMCS Field Services is great."

Matthew Vas, Reliability Team Lead, Uniper

To find out how AMCS Field Services could benefit your utility team

AMCS Field Services provides an effective fixed asset management solution for the utilities industry. Whether your utility provides water, natural gas, electricity, or a combination of all three – our software solution provides your team with visibility into field operations, sample management tracking, and the health of your infrastructure.

Request a demo today →

