



**WHITEPAPER**

# How to Select a Fire Rescue Learning Management System for Your Department

# Learning management systems (LMS) can save money and streamline training and tracking for departments of all types and sizes. Learn about key components you should look for before deciding which LMS is right for your fire department.

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For the modern fire department, enhancing firefighter safety, better protecting communities and providing exceptional patient care necessitate regular training to refresh skills and learn new techniques, policies and protocols. It's critical that departments keep their personnel trained in order to improve response and lower risks both to their personnel and the communities they protect.

Also, depending on the state, firefighters may be required to:

- Meet specific training requirements on state or national standards, including OSHA, FEMA and NFPA guidelines
- Earn a certain number of continuing education hours for EMS recertification
- Stay up-to-date on department policies

With both department ongoing training and mandated state and EMS training, a single firefighter might accumulate hundreds of training records in a single year. Training Officers in a small or medium-sized department can quickly amass thousands of training records annually for their personnel.

## THE CHALLENGE FOR TRAINING FIREFIGHTERS

With that level of activity, documentation is the key. It is required for satisfying accreditation requirements and for reporting training to management and city managers, as well as making sure your entire staff is consistently trained and onboarded.

### THE SOLUTION

To meet the increasing challenges of training, record keeping and risk management, fire departments are turning to online training solutions like learning management systems (LMS) to streamline these critical fire department functions.

## WHAT IS AN LMS?

LMS is an acronym for learning management system:

### LEARNING

Users of the LMS can increase knowledge by completing courses offered by your LMS provider or agency-specific customized courses.

## MANAGEMENT

Organization is easy with an LMS. Anything from creating, updating, assigning and tracking courses - both online and in person - to reporting accreditation requirements and sending announcements or reminders can be done in an LMS. A good LMS can even manage onboarding of new staff or manage policies and procedures.

## SYSTEM

As a software-as-a-service (SaaS) system, training is accessible anywhere at any time to users, trainers and administrators. The LMS organizes all training-related needs in a central location that's cloud-based and replaces tedious spreadsheet data entry or archaic paper-based tracking of training attendance and course certificates.

Combined, they equal time savings for training administrators, streamlined workflow, reduced liability, and cost savings.

But, most importantly, it means a better trained, engaged and prepared department.

# FEATURES OF AN LMS

While migrating a portion of your training into an LMS may feel like a no-brainer, selecting the system that best fits your department is a challenging process that requires consideration of a wide range of factors - from features and content to technical capabilities and picking the right partner.

## STANDARD LMS FEATURES

A good LMS will go beyond off-the-shelf training and offer features that will provide additional value, helping to improve training processes. Here are some of the features an LMS may provide and are worth evaluating for your department.

- 1. COURSE BUILDER** - LMS technology often has course authoring or creation capabilities so you can build or upload your own courses. This includes audio, video, articles, slide presentations, surveys and other interactive elements, like quizzes or tests.
- 2. ASSIGNMENT MANAGER** - Organize courses into a training plan for specific groups or users. You can regulate the due dates by week, month, quarter or annual training cycle. This means you can customize your course list based on state-mandated requirements, individual needs and department policies.
- 3. MOBILE ACCESS** - An LMS can be cloud-based, which allows firefighters to train anywhere and with any device that can access the internet. This includes mobile, desktop and tablet access. Personnel can train at the station, in between calls, or during the time set aside for completion of training.
- 4. USER AND GROUP MANAGEMENT** - Trainers can assign courses or training plans by shift, rank,

position or division. This feature makes it easy to stay organized and efficient to train more effectively.

- 5. CREDENTIAL TRACKING** - Never fall behind on credentials and certifications. LMS dashboards can alert users if progress toward recertification is behind schedule, in progress, or completed. The system can also send weekly automated reports to keep track of your department's efforts.
- 6. ISO TRACKING** - Make ISO audits simple. With various levels of reporting and pre-built templates for Driver, Officer and Firefighter, a strong LMS can document online and offline activities to assist in and make the ISO review process easy.
- 7. EVENT MANAGEMENT** - If your department is hosting a one-time event (like an expert speaker presentation), or a regularly repeated event (like a demonstration of proper CPR techniques) you can organize those events within an LMS. Track event capacity, time commitments, and coordinate schedules to ensure everyone has the opportunity to attend and gets credit for participating in the event.
- 8. DIGITAL TASKBOOKS** - More advanced systems will also include technology to create a streamlined workflow management process that allows for taskbooks to go through a multi-level signature process and show completion status, as well as hours earned.
- 9. SKILLS TRACKING** - Having a system that tracks online training is part of the puzzle. Your LMS should also offer a solution to create realistic scenarios, situational evaluations and customized forms to record live training and allow for live scoring of in-person drills.
- 10. REPORTING** - Reporting is automated and customized for general training but also for meeting ISO requirements or career advancement. Seamlessly pull reports with the information you need in the event of an audit, or for visibility into the progress your personnel have made toward annual training requirements.
- 11. ADVANCED FEATURES** - A more advanced LMS might offer learning analytics, career path management and training plans, digital forms or integration with related systems.

## **TECHNICAL LMS FEATURES**

An exceptional LMS should leverage SaaS technology, which means the platform is subscription-based and doesn't need to be hosted by your department within your IT infrastructure.

SaaS technology eliminates the burden of having to navigate technical hurdles and allows one or more training officers or administrators to manage content on an LMS from any device connected to the internet — a convenience for many departments.

A SaaS-based LMS technology vendor is responsible for system upgrades, adding and improving features, maintaining a library of accredited courses, and securing the system. Without SaaS technology, departments are on the hook for building their own training platform and having an internal

IT team manage the infrastructure.

With SaaS technology, the only task for your IT department is to make sure personnel have access to the LMS log-in from internet connected devices. As a training administrator or officer, your focus should be entirely on education, not navigating technical hurdles.

Now you should determine what your LMS should accomplish.

## ESTABLISH YOUR LMS OBJECTIVES

Every department has different objectives and goals to meet. It's important to identify these before evaluating specific LMS providers.

Most often, the primary goals of an LMS are to find a cost-effective solution to:

- Help firefighters meet accreditation requirements
- Improve records management
- Track completion of training
- Improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of those at your department
- Mitigate risk by understanding policies, protocols or laws

Also check out: [How can an LMS help firefighters meet training mandates?](#)

## MEET YOUR LMS OBJECTIVES

Here are a handful of the ways an LMS can help your department meet those objectives.

### **ONLINE LEARNING IS CUSTOMIZABLE**

Whether your department needs to adhere to National Registry guidelines, NFPA, state-specific fire and EMS training standards, or internal requirements, you can ensure your program is compliant.

For example, [FireRescue1 Academy](#) already has more than 350 courses and 150 videos on topics, like:

- Medical (Airway, Cardiovascular, Operations)
- Firefighter 1 and 2
- Fire Officer

FireRescue1 Academy's LMS also provides authoring tools so you can create courses specific to your needs.

### **AN LMS MAKES IT EASY TO TRACK OFFLINE TRAINING**

All time can be easily accounted for and reported - even if you're working in microlearning sessions,

which are shorter segments of training.

For instance, if you want to credit each shift for 15 minutes of training, you can:

- Watch a short video together as a group
- Select everyone in attendance through the LMS
- Track 15 minutes of training, which can be categorized or assigned to a training topic like emergency operations, pain management or trauma.

After taking a series of videos on a similar topic and accruing one hour of training, credit can be applied toward annual compliance requirements.

## **AN LMS IMPROVES YOUR FIREFIGHTERS' SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE**

Course libraries within an LMS are vast and can provide training for many high-liability issues. This might include topics such as:

- Airway management
- Pediatric emergencies
- Emergency vehicle operations (EVOC)
- Search and rescue

Access to online courses makes it easier for your firefighters to dive deeper into topics that relate to your community or their individual needs.

Online learning also provides consistency to ensure each member in your department has received the same training content regardless of their station or work schedule.

## **LMS MITIGATES RISK**

Departments can mitigate risk with a two-pronged approach.

First, the organizational tools inherent in an LMS make it easier to track training in the event of an audit.

Departments are able to:

- Eliminate spreadsheets
- Accurately track all training online and offline digitally
- Manage compliance with training mandates and department policies
- Send automated reports to track progress

Second, by offering expanded training opportunities, you are reducing liability costs at your department. Your personnel will have tools to train more effectively, which improves safety and decreases workplace accidents.

In order to realize these benefits, you'll need to evaluate the quality of the content offered by the LMS provider.

# WHAT YOU SHOULD LOOK FOR IN A COURSE LIBRARY

A comprehensive fire and EMS training library is critical to the success of your online learning program. When researching an LMS solution, ask your provider the following:

## **HAVE THE COURSES BEEN CREATED BY A SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT?**

A subject matter expert has experience teaching, speaking and writing on the course topic. Their expertise is beyond what can simply be learned on the job. A subject matter expert is able to leverage their additional learning, research and experience into a valuable educational program for the intended audience. For example, FireRescue1 Academy currently utilizes the knowledge of well-known trainers like Marc Bashoor and Rob Wylie who would be out of reach for most departments relying exclusively on in-person training.

## **HOW OFTEN ARE COURSES AND VIDEOS UPDATED?**

Firefighting is a dynamic and ever-evolving profession. While some tools and techniques have been used for generations, new knowledge, research and experience has created new concepts.

An LMS vendor should combine training officer and student feedback with regular subject matter expert review to make sure courses are up-to-date, applicable to the needs of today's fire and rescue personnel and relevant to the work they do.

## **ARE THE COURSES ACCREDITED TO MEET REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS?**

Although the Commission on Accreditation for Prehospital Continuing Education (CAPCE) is accepted in nearly every state for EMS, regulatory and accreditation requirements for fire and EMS training vary. Ask about acceptance of courses to meet those requirements and whether specific steps are taken to meet requirements. Additionally, get to know what reporting capabilities are offered so you can easily show proof of course completion.

## **DOES THE LMS HAVE AUTHORING TOOLS SO I CAN BUILD MY OWN COURSES THAT ARE DEPARTMENT-SPECIFIC?**

A robust online learning system should have varied courses bundled with the system, as well as the ability to build or upload your own courses to meet specific needs. Quizzes, videos, audio, reading and multimedia modules are all important for a comprehensive online training experience.

Ultimately, the more robust your online course offerings are, the less outside training you'll need to provide —and pay— for.

# NINE QUESTIONS TO ASK WHILE EVALUATING YOUR ONLINE LEARNING RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

When selected and implemented correctly, an LMS should have a positive impact on your department's bottom line. But, with a purchase this significant, it's important to ask the right questions to make sure you know what to expect - and to anticipate any hidden costs.

Here are some of the factors that must be considered in calculating ROI for your department from an LMS purchase.

First, a couple of questions specific to your LMS provider:

- 1. WHAT TIME COMMITMENT WILL BE REQUIRED FROM YOUR IT TEAM?** Is your LMS SaaS-based or will you need IT department help?
- 2. HOW DOES THE LMS PRICING WORKS?** Make sure there are no hidden fees associated with setup or ongoing maintenance. Ask for a clear pricing structure.

Then, considerations specific to your department's current training-related expenses:

- 3. HOW MUCH OUTSOURCING FOR TRAINING DOES YOUR DEPARTMENT CURRENTLY DO?** Will an online solution help eliminate costs for hiring outside trainers or sending firefighters to training seminars or conferences?
- 4. HOW MUCH OVERTIME DO YOU PAY BECAUSE OF TRAINING?** If online learning can be utilized any time and any place, will you be able to eliminate OT costs associated with in-person training?
- 5. CAN YOU REDUCE YOUR TRAINING OFFICER'S OVERTIME BY HAVING ACCESS TO READY-MADE TRAINING PACKAGES?** If your LMS has a strong catalog of training, can you reduce the time commitment for developing lesson plans and delivering the same course numerous times?
- 6. DO YOU PAY YOUR ADMINISTRATORS OVERTIME?** If an online learning solution helps streamline HR inputs and reduce the time to onboard (or off-board) personnel, will it impact OT rates for your administration?
- 7. CAN YOU SAVE TIME ONBOARDING NEW RECRUITS?** A new recruit training plan that bundles new employee courses required by the city or county with department-specific new hire training can onboard new firefighters quicker while making sure all new employees have the same baseline of information.
- 8. CAN YOU REDUCE THE RISK OF CERTIFICATION EXPIRATION?** Improved reporting and tracking capabilities in an LMS will help your department avoid penalties when audited for credentials.
- 9. WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH POOR TRAINING?** From turnover to liability expenses, poor training can carry a high price tag when things go sideways.

For a true ROI, a sales representative from the LMS company you're working with should be able to detail their pricing structure compared to your current training expenditures.



“With FireRescue1 Academy, I can simply assign modules to be completed. The **best part is the accountability** - I set updates to review required module completions before I allow the students to take the State test, it has made my job so much easier.”

- Ray Rodriguez, EMS/HazMat Coordinator  
Danbury Fire Department, CT

Understanding your ROI is important, but coming up with the initial budget isn't always easy. It's worth noting that grants exist to help with fire department purchases including training and education. Comprehensive information and assistance about all steps of the grant process including research, alert and [application help can be found online](#).

## HOW TO IMPLEMENT AN LMS

After selecting the LMS, it's important to quickly implement the system into your department's overall training plan and calendar.

Here are some tips to make that process smooth and to gaining system adoption:

### **START LMS IMPLEMENTATION IMMEDIATELY**

The training staff needs to identify topics traditionally presented in person, like an annual sexual harassment update, to deliver instead through the LMS or select courses that align with their training program for the year that they'll use toward retraining or recertification requirements. Maximize the ROI by minimizing duplication of training or tracking efforts with legacy systems and processes. Assess what certifications or annual requirements need to be tracked and what processes - such as onboarding of new staff - can be automated.

### **ASSIGN ADMINISTRATOR ROLES TO KEY TRAINING PERSONNEL**

The LMS will have different roles and permissions for use of the system features. One or two administrators should have unrestricted access to create training, add and remove users, generate reports and fully utilize all of the LMS features. A group manager has a narrower set of permissions to manage a specific group of users within a team, division and/or unit. A group manager can only assign training, send messages and generate reports for the group they manage.

Your LMS vendor should offer in-depth LMS training during an onboarding process for administrators and group managers.

### **CREATE A PEER USER SUPPORT TEAM**

Every shift or station has a firefighter who is more tech savvy and likely willing to help their peers learn to use the LMS. Give these digital natives early access to explore the LMS, complete training and trial features so they are ready to support their peers when the LMS is open to all.

### **LEVERAGE TIME-SAVING ADMINISTRATOR TOOLS**

Use LMS features to batch upload existing personnel records, like certifications, rank, station, and training records for the current training cycle. Save additional time by automating the assignment of users to groups based on their attributes for use when assigning courses or running reports later.

For example, USAR personnel might be on different shifts or stations, but any department member with a USAR training credential should automatically be added to the USAR group.

### **CREATE A TRAINING PLAN FOR EACH USER GROUP**

Group managers and administrators need to select and assign courses to members of each group early in the LMS implementation. Plan the next month, quarter or year of training, which can be a mix of online courses and offline training activities.

Take advantage of LMS features to automate notifications of the course due dates and completion reports as you set-up the training plan.

### **CONTACT CUSTOMER SUPPORT EARLY AND OFTEN**

Lean on the experts to teach your department how to efficiently and effectively use the LMS. Depending on your previous experience, the learning curve to administer an LMS might be steep but the results will be worth it.

Webinars, videos, phone calls, email, chat and FAQs are likely available options to engage with your LMS provider to answer questions and walk you through steps in the implementation process. It's also important that end users - the fire and rescue professionals who work 24/7 - have access to automated support features for things like password resets or answers to frequently asked questions about how to find and complete a course, how to add an offline training record, or how to update a certification or credential.

The implementation phase might take a few hours or several weeks, depending on the size of your department, the functionality your department intends to use, and the ease of accessing existing training records for import into the LMS. The potential time and complexity underscores the importance of selecting an LMS platform with excellent customer service to assist with day-to-day troubleshooting like helping users to navigate the system or resetting forgotten passwords, as well as the administrative tasks of batch uploading records, setting up credentials, importing users and creating training plans. Make sure to ask references about the customer service they have received. Was it timely, useful and friendly?

## **IT SUPPORT AND INTEGRATION WITH OTHER SOFTWARE SYSTEMS**

During the selection phase, you either opted for a cloud-based SaaS LMS (most likely) or a locally installed on-premise solution. If you opted for an LMS that is a locally installed solution, you will definitely need to include your IT department during the setup, security and ongoing management and software update phases. But even a SaaS LMS will require some level of IT involvement, from configuring firewalls to email delivery. Not all providers offer the same capabilities, so weigh your internal IT resources and needs carefully.

Additionally, some LMS systems integrate with systems for improved human resources and training productivity, as well as other functions. For example, FireRescue1 Academy integrates with [Kronos' Telestaff software](#) and Firehouse Software by ESO.

An important feature offered by some LMS providers, including FireRescue1 Academy, is operating a single sign-on (SSO) framework. So, when an IT person needs to onboard or off-board staff, they can easily activate or deactivate the user in their system and the change will be applied in the LMS.

## THE FINAL STEPS

The right LMS will make life easier for the training division staff and end users at your department.

To ensure a long-term partnership with your LMS provider, be thorough when evaluating features and ask the right questions.

Some recommendations:

- **GET A DEMO TO EXPLAIN EACH FEATURE OF THE PARTNER'S LMS, IN DETAIL.** Ask for multiple demos, if needed, to make sure all decision makers and stakeholders are aware of the pros and cons of the LMS being evaluated.
- **REQUEST TRIAL ACCESS.** Spend time on the platform to evaluate the ease of use to add users, create training plans, build courses, track completion and generate reports on your own time.
- **ASK ABOUT THE VENDOR SUPPORT PROCESS.** Ensure that you will receive help when you need it. Ask about turnaround time when you contact support. Can you actually get someone on the phone? Do you have a dedicated contact?
- **CONTACT REFERENCES.** Do you know anyone at a department currently using the platform? Get their feedback on their experience with the provider, from content to technology to support.
- **COMMITMENT.** Make sure fire and EMS is a focus area for the company you choose and that they have a vision for how their product will continue to improve.

Selecting an LMS is a big task, but with big rewards - including better, more efficient training at a fraction of the cost of traditional offline training. Because you'll be making a multi-year commitment, it's important to weigh all factors carefully to select the right LMS technology and partner - one who will grow with you as your training needs evolve.

For more information on LMS and online learning, continue reading here:

- [How to meet fire training requirements and decrease risk with online learning](#)