EOC IN A BOX

OR, What I Did With My EMPG

# Purpose

These items allow me to operate as efficiently and effectively as I believe I should. Although smaller emergency departments are often short on personnel we still must complete most of the exact same procedures followed by larger organizations. These products allow for almost instantaneous completion of mandatory forms, such as ICS forms, as well as capturing and modifying handwritten documents that come into the EOC such as Volunteer signup sheets. Of critical importance is the ability to track assets used, both those owned locally as well as assets received via MEMA. It is now possible to know, at any point in time, who has an asset and where it is. In addition, there will always be enough documentation to satisfy FEMA should the event become reimbursable under the Stafford Act.

# Primary Problems Solved

I found, when responding to the tone and standing up the EOC I never had all of the items I needed causing a number of trips back to the normal office to retrieve items needed. These items might be physical things but are most often electronic files and documents that were being worked on in the “normal” office.

I have often been forced to forego the use of ICS forms during the initial hours of an emergency because I lack the time or personnel to fill in all of the “boilerplate” information required. Using the Pathagoras software product in this kit I can populate the basic things such as date, time, incident name, etc., in 60 seconds and begin using the ICS forms immediately.

As volunteers and staff show up and get assets to use in the field to deal with the incident, these assets were often not tracked well. This means that I might not know where an item is at any point in time or who is using it. If these assets are borrowed assets, this is particularly troublesome. In addition, when it comes time to file for reimbursement it is more than just possible that some assets that were used were included in the reimbursement filing.

As volunteers sign up at various locations and the sign-up sheets are brought to the EOC it is difficult to find a way to not lose them. Then, six months later when filing for reimbursement I might know what volunteers signed in on a given day but not what they were doing. There may be handwritten notes on the roster, such as clearing debris, but when filing for reimbursement you need to know whether this was Category A, or Category B work. It is easy to know this during the incident but almost impossible to prove to FEMA six months after the fact. With the PaperPort software product I can scan a handwritten document, insert additional fields anywhere I can find a clear place and type in any information necessary to understand what the document describes.

The number of forms that need to be completed can seem endless and unless there is a way to receive them electronically it is very difficult to complete these in a clear, legible way. Again, it is PaperPort that allows me to scan any form and then fill it out exactly as you would if it were received electronically.

In general, during the first several hours following the initiation of an incident EMDs may find they are expending as much energy simply flailing around as they are spending managing the situation.

These problems are not limited to smaller communities. Most organizations could use help with document assembly. Even some larger organizations do not have a truly flexible, professional asset tagging and tracking system. In almost every situation there is something to be said for having the basic tools located in one place and available for immediate use.

# What Can I Do With These Items?

* Access and operate on any electronic item from anywhere, using any PC or Smart Phone. The documents I create in my office are available to me in the EOC.
* Scan documents, such as ICS Forms, for variables and then populate them with “boilerplate” information such as incident name, briefing date and time, Incident Action Period information, Organization Chart, etc.
* Assemble documents, both simple like a Declaration of a State of Emergency, as well as more complicated items such as the After Action Report, starting with a blank form and pulling in snippets of text pulled from other documents.
* Track all assets in use, including borrowed assets.
* Maintain a record of all assets used for reimbursement purposes.
* Convert any document, including handwritten documents, in an editable PDF file.
* Manage files, whether originally printed or handwritten, exactly as you would handle a pile of paper.
* Fill out any form

# Base Contents

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| **Item** | **Source** | **Cost** |
| Panasonic CF-54 Toughbook | TransCOR Information Technologies | $ 2,134.71 |
| Windows 7 Professional | SHI International Corp |  1,838.00 |
| Wasp WLS 9600 Barcode Scanner | SHI International Corp |  181.00 |
| Wasp WPL305 Label Printer | SHI International Corp |  373.00 |
| Wasp labels | SHI International Corp |  19.00 |
| WaspProtect Extended Service | SHI International Corp |  104.00 |
| PaperPort Professional | SHI International Corp |  160.00 |
| Norton Security with Backup | SHI International Corp |  79.00 |
| OfficeProPlus 2013 | SHI International Corp |  340.00 |
| WD My Cloud WDBCTL0060HWT | SHI International Corp |  270.00 |
| Canon P-21511 Scanner | SHI International Corp |  249.00 |
| Pathagoras Document Management | Innovative Software Products of Virginia |  379.00 |
| Pelican Case | Cases Cases |  580.91 |
| **Total** |  | **$ 6,707.62** |

# My Value Add

There are products of value to emergency managers of any sized organization on this list. I’ve spent several years researching each of the aspects of managing an event to find these products so you don’t have to.

The first important item actually isn’t in the box; it is installed on the LAN at the Public Safety Building. The obvious solution to not having all of the files I need in the EOC is to put everything “in the cloud”. If I’m going to put emergency management files in the cloud I wanted to know the cloud I was using was protected to public safety standards. The only way I knew to do this was to own my own cloud and that is what the Western Digital MyCloud device is. I selected the 6 TB device which will hold everything I will ever need to store there. I no longer have any Word files or PDF documents or Excel spreadsheets or images on any computer I use. Everything I work on is stored to this device and is, therefore, available to me anywhere I might be. And I know how it is maintained because I do that and I can see the thing every day.

Pathagoras is so powerful I’m not able to even explain everything that it can do but I can tell you it does what I need done as no other software product does. It was designed to let lawyers build an error free document, such as a will, from pre-developed and well researched, clauses. Once the document has been assembled Pathagoras can scan it for variables, such as the person’s name, present this list to you and allow you to provide the replacement for the variable. I use it to fill in all of the standard, known stuff that is needed before you begin to actually use ICS forms. I also use it to complete things, such as the EMPG application where much of the document is standard and only needs to have information about this year’s project inserted.

PaperPort is a software product that, among other things, allows one or more multiple page documents to be manipulated exactly as you would if they were real and on your real desk. You might have two documents that, once completed, need to be turned into a single document. That is a simple drag and drop, just as if they were stacks of real paper on your desk. If you need to insert one or more pages into the middle of this document, you simply “turn” to the place it belongs and insert the pages, again just as you would with stacks of paper on your desk. If you are handed a hardcopy package of forms, such as from the USDA, you simple scan them in. PaperPort will identify the places you need to complete and let you type it in just as you would have done with a real pile of forms and a typewriter.

I spent a lot of time researching portable scanners. The Cannon scanner on this list is uniquely suited to the task I as it to do. It is small and can operate using power from the USB port of the laptop. This lets me pull it out at a meeting, scan in the handouts, and have no paper to carry. PaperPort connects to this scanner so I can open the scanned paper and take my notes right on the document, as I used to do with real paper which I then often couldn’t find when I needed it.

The laptop I selected is the Panasonic CF-54 Toughbook. Most people seem to opt for the CF-31, the big, thick, padded Toughbook. According to Panasonic the only difference in the specifications of these two products is that you can drop the CF-31 from 6’ but you can only drop the CF-54 from 4’. I recommend not dropping them at all and saving a lot of money. The CF-54 fits nicely in the Pelican case, it is light and can run for hours without being plugged in.

I purchased most of these items through SHI, because they are on the state contract for all of these items and it allowed me almost “one stop shopping”. My contact was Tylere Daniel at Tylere\_Daniel@shi.com. His phone number is (732) 652-6383. I’ve shown the prices I paid above but I must insert the usual prices may vary statement because these products are updated and the prices are based on volume.

I purchased the Toughbook from TransCOR because they were the only vendor I found listed for selling Toughbooks on the state list. SHI says I could have purchased it through them. I was in a hurry and did not further research but if that is true, this reduces the number of vendors to deal with by one.

Pathagoras is a unique product so I purchased it directly from the vendor, Innovative Software of Virginia. SHI is in the process of negotiating the ability to sell that product as well. If you are interested and call Tylere it is possible he can provide that product. I should mention that I’ve never received the kind of support I get for Pathagoras from any other vendor. Any time I’ve hit a wall and couldn’t figure something out and email to the vendor is answered within minutes, sometimes seconds, with a GoToMeeting code and the author shows me exactly how to get the results I need.

I selected Wasp as my asset management product because it can be made to do everything I think I need to do in that area, the vendor offers both the software and the hardware items such as a barcode printer, and because I could afford it within the budget I had established for the EMPG FFY2013/2014 combination. I can, and have, tagged all of the assets assigned to my emergency management department and defined their location. Wasp allows me to include a picture of the item and has numerous optional fields that I can use to describe things like what key is used to access them.

Lastly, I purchased the Pelican case from Cases Cases. First, I did this because they were listed on the state contract but also because the internal protective padding of each case is cut to your specific needs. Even if you choose to purchase the EOC in a box exactly as I did there are other things you will want to have in your box to meet your needs, so each box is uniquely designed to carry the items you need.

# The Bottom Line

These products have allowed me to operate as efficiently as I am in my dreams. This has also greatly increased my effectiveness because I can spend more time managing an incident and less flailing around just trying to keep up with the administrative tasks inherent in this job. While these products were selected while thinking about managing an emergency, I use almost everything in the box on a day-to-day basis and they allow me to operate in a fundamentally more efficient way. All of my assets are now tagged. There is a field in Wasp that shows how an item was purchased. So I can run a report of all items purchased with funds from the FFY2011 grant. This allows me to respond to any inquiries about how funds were used but also allows me to then do my own audit to be sure all of the items are where they should be and in working condition.

The licenses for both PaperPort and Pathagoras allow use on two PCs and you can be sure I’m taking advantage of that. These are software packages I use every day. Although I don’t think I will live long enough to learn every one of the features in Pathagoras I do know that I find ways to make my work both easier and more professional appearing on a regular basis.