Tools to Streamline the Life Safety System Inspection Process

When it comes to meeting today’s most pressing challenges in healthcare facilities management, innovative web technologies can make a big difference – helping to create a safe, secure environment while supporting the overall efforts to simplify operations, improve efficiency and ensure compliance.

By Chris Woodcock and Jack Kleminich

Healthcare facilities executives and staff work in highly complex environments and have a huge responsibility in overseeing the inspection, testing, maintenance, repair and regulatory compliance of life safety systems and operations. This includes fire detection and alarm, fire sprinkler, and fire suppression systems. In addition, there are NFPA standards and compliance requirements established by The Joint Commission and other accreditation organizations that govern the documentation of fire and life safety system inspections.

The good news is that technology is definitely on the side of the healthcare facilities management professional. In the fire and life safety arena, advanced software capabilities and smart solutions are available to provide greater simplicity, increased efficiency, reduced life-cycle costs, and easier code and regulatory reporting and compliance.

An electronic inspection reporting solution is a prime example of the value that technology can bring to healthcare facilities operations. This type of solution is designed to be fast, accurate and user-friendly. It can streamline the entire data collection, documentation and retrieval process, eliminating time delays, compliance issues and other inefficiencies often resulting from manual inspection reporting. It also can streamline responsibilities so that a facility with limited staff can track and document follow-up activity on the correction of deficiencies, including the verification testing required within a 45-day period.

In essence, this solution can be the cornerstone of a life safety compliance program that dramatically improves the inspection, review, repair and documentation process associated with requirements from The Joint Commission, DNV Healthcare, American Osteopathic Association, and the Healthcare Facilities Accreditation Program as well as NFPA standards enforced by authorities having jurisdiction (AHJs).

Electronic inspection reporting provides documentation that allows a healthcare facility director to get a quick but comprehensive look at the compliance status of fire alarm, fire sprinkler, and suppression devices and systems at any time. It uses a highly efficient data capture and reporting system to deliver an up-to-date inventory of inspections, deficiencies and corrective actions so the Environment of Care 02.03.05 binder can be easily updated.

Taking the benefits one step further, an electronic inspection reporting solution can be integrated with a customer portal, thereby providing the capability for online storage of inspection data. A secure customer portal can offer a quick, on-demand view of life safety inventory and archived inspection reports. It also can enable dynamic queries of data. For instance, a healthcare facilities manager can research a particular situation, such as whether all detectors were tested within a calendar year, and export the results of the query into a customized Excel report for further data analysis.

Saving Time, Money and Resources

For healthcare institutions, an electronic inspection reporting solution can help overcome challenges and better manage
the life safety environment — saving time, money and resources; creating greater efficiencies; and maintaining the highest levels of safety and property protection.

As an example, healthcare facilities and campuses are typically protected with fire alarm and suppression systems. These systems often include more than 1,000 devices, including pull stations, detectors, notification appliances, sprinklers, water flow switches, fire department connections and more. Given the size and complexity of these systems, it can be very challenging to stay in compliance and meet the requirements outlined by accreditation organizations, NFPA, local fire marshals and insurers.

Without an electronic inspection reporting program, a healthcare institution may be carrying out inspection, testing and reporting using a traditional industry format. Some shortfalls of this method of reporting in reference to Element of Performance (EP) 25 guidelines are:

• No EP identifier on report pages.
• Frequency of inspection not listed on report pages.
• No NFPA code, year and section of reference listed on report pages.
• No procedures outlined to perform inspect and test.
• No comparison summary of device counts tested from last inspection to this inspection.
• No place on the reports where the inspector is identified at the device level in order to accommodate team inspections.

Clearly, healthcare facilities professionals must devote a significant amount of time and oversight to handling compliance responsibilities — time that might be better spent elsewhere. Software-based electronic inspection reporting offers a quick view into life safety system inventory, inspection, repair and documentation. It’s an advanced database and reporting system that provides:

• Real-time, up-to-date information to keep fire alarm, fire sprinkler and suppression systems compliant.
• A master inventory of all devices in a facility’s fire alarm, fire sprinkler and fire suppression systems.
• Inspection frequency guidelines predicated on the device type and local codes.
• Identification of all NFPA-required procedures performed on devices, including NFPA 72: National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code; NFPA 25: Standard for the Inspection, Testing and Maintenance of Water-Based Fire Protection Systems; NFPA 30: Flammable and Combustible Liquids Code; and others.
• Reports listing all inspection, testing and repair procedures that were performed — and the retesting results.

The Ability to Quickly Review and Validate Compliance

With this type of e-services solution, healthcare facilities executives, managers and supervisors can review and validate compliance of major fire protection systems in much less time than it takes using traditional reporting formats. The solution enables a healthcare facilities manager to compare inspection results between inspection cycles in a given calendar year. It can even capture inspection information while technicians are on-site.

An electronic inspection solution provides added benefits with respect to inspection reporting for compliance purposes. Electronic views can be automatically generated to display inspection, maintenance and repairs across the entire facility’s fire alarm and suppression systems. The screens are simple to review and evaluate — and can be presented in a way that satisfies Joint Commission requirements for inspection, documentation, maintenance, repair and retesting. The resulting data can provide a 360-degree view of how and when each deficiency was handled, from inspection to final repair and testing.

As a result of this capability, fire protection and life safety compliance officials — at The Joint Commission, DNV Healthcare, American Osteopathic Association, Healthcare Facilities Accreditation Program, and local fire marshals and other AHJs — have easy access to electronic documentation reports. The reports are available in a comprehensive format — via email, fax, pdf or hard copy — and formatted to meet The Joint Commission’s Environment of Care 02.03.05 requirements. Plus, all information is stored in an electronic database where it can be accessed by authorized personnel via a secure customer portal.

Conclusion

These days, healthcare facilities management professionals must look for every opportunity to identify and implement advanced technologies that offer an edge, provide value and make their lives easier. An electronic inspection reporting solution can do exactly that with fire and life safety systems. In this increasingly data-driven world, it’s a way of connecting to the right information in order to manage risk, operate efficiently and ensure life safety system compliance — while at the same time protecting patients, staff, and visitors and fulfilling the institution’s healthcare mission.

About the Author

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