EL PASO COUNTY, COLORADO

El Paso County Public Health Increases Efficiency with Better Data Management

El Paso County, the most populous county in Colorado, encompasses more than 2,158 square miles. Situated at the base of historical Pikes Peak, El Paso is primarily compromised of mountains on the western side and prairies on the east. The beautiful setting gives way to endless recreational activities for residents and visitors.

For the Environmental Health Division of El Paso County, Colorado, antiquated software systems hindered activities intended to protect public health. With unreliable data, El Paso's leadership could not count on their system when making decisions – ones that were critical to employees, services and finances. The County could not easily or efficiently track productivity, justify fees, monitor accounts or provide information to the State or other managing bodies. Most important, disparate data systems meant management could not take measure of their public health impact.

Time for a change

A paper-based system made it difficult for the County to track programs, monitor agency finances and efficiently perform inspections. Tom Gonzales, El Paso County's Director of Environmental Health, saw the effects first-hand. In order to know how many pools the division monitored, for example, someone would have to go to a storage room and count files. He couldn't determine how many restaurants also had wells or septic systems, or calculate the average time it took to complete enforcement actions. El Paso County assessed fees based on a mix of licensing and inspection fees, with additional charges for follow-up activities. Without any alerts in place for additional services, financial staff wouldn't always know that facilities needed to be billed for follow-up inspections. Additionally, environmental health specialists would use paper forms to perform inspections and then return to the office to enter tedious inspection data, capping each inspector at two inspections per day.

"We've become incredibly transparent. The most important thing for us is that it took a division that was siloed in individual data management systems and brought us all under one system."

Tom Gonzales, Director of Environmental Health

Population
644,964

Challenge
Unreliable data caused the County to inefficiently track productivity, justify fees, monitor accounts and provide information to the State and other managing bodies

Solution
Accela Environmental Health

Results
Increased efficiency with ability to perform 33% more inspections

Reduced annual paper costs by 50%

Consolidated various inspection forms to create a single consumer health inspection form

Increased transparency, making information easily accessible to staff and citizens

It was time for a change. "We needed to go paperless and we needed to be mobile. Our environmental health specialists have four-year degrees. They shouldn't be behind a desk doing data entry; they should be out doing their jobs." Gonzales had prior experience with Accela Environmental Health and had been very impressed with the solution's broad reach of capabilities. After he presented the facts that helped get leadership on board, El Paso County decided to move forward with implementation.

How Accela empowers El Paso

Gonzales knew from his previous implementation that it was essential to have someone knowledgeable about data management involved in the process, and he knew Chris Wright, an experienced data analyst, was the person for the job. Key players from each program met with Wright weekly to be trained, provide input and assist with configuration of the system. Wright credits their focus on the data as being a key factor in the project's success. From the beginning, their efforts had been on collecting the data that heavily impacts the community. With Accela, El Paso County has been able to consolidate food inspection and pool inspection forms and, in turn, they've created a dynamic consumer health inspection form. Furthermore, the Consumer Health Report has been an excellent example of El Paso County Public Health making its data work harder. Rather than maintaining multiple custom inspection forms, the Division employs one consolidated report driven by user input.

The bottom line

After implementation, training and going live with the new system, efficiency at El Paso County Public Health is up by 33%. Now, inspectors can complete their inspections on a mobile device in the field and, where possible, multiple inspections have been consolidated into one visit. When health specialists perform additional services, a report automatically alerts the leading program assistant, who now knows which specific facility to bill. Additionally, El Paso was able to bring back three programs that were shelved during the 2008 economic downturn, without having to hire additional staff. "That makes my boss and board very happy. I don't have to drastically raise fees," Gonzales gladly shares.

Printing inspection results onsite was once expensive and inefficient. The Accela solution has enabled Gonzales and Wright to email inspection information and post it online. And, because of this, annual paper costs are down by almost 50%.

Gonzales no longer has to guess about time and activity to plan fees. With Accela Environmental Health, he is able to quickly run a report that totals time spent on each service. "I know just by looking at my dashboard reports that we have 2,400 active retail food establishments and 347 active child care facilities. I'll be on a conference call with the State, and they might ask me, 'How many restaurants do you have?' and 'How many with over 200 seats?' and I'll be able to tell them exact numbers."

About Accela

At Accela, we believe that engagement makes all the difference. We're ushering in a new era where democracy thrives when government works directly with the people, coming to citizens on their terms through mobile devices, social media and networks, and open data. By streamlining critical agency functions like land, asset and right of way management, licensing, legislative management, recreation and resource management, citizen relationship management and environmental health and safety, the Accela Civic Platform bridges the gap between agencies and citizens. We help build better communities by powering thousands of services and millions of transactions daily for agencies of all sizes. Accela is headquartered in San Ramon, California, with offices in San Francisco, New York, Melbourne and Dubai.

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