

Research and Recommendations Lead Westport Police Department to TAB FusionRMS Enterprise for Property and Evidence.

Tracking the couple thousand property and evidence items that flow annually through the Town of Westport Police Department used to be rough going. Dale Call, deputy chief of the department that serves approximately 26,000 citizens in the coastal town an hour north of New York City, recalls, "Our manual, paper-based system was sorely lacking. We had no effective or efficient way to audit the coming, going and destruction of items. Then we discovered a major theft from the evidence room, and we launched an intensive search for an electronic system that would help us prevent future breaches."

The Culprit

"What we had was an Excel spreadsheet, plain and simple," says Computer Systems Analyst Michael Guman, a 38-year department veteran who has been responsible for programming and network design for the past 21 years. "We listed each piece of property, its associated case number, whether the case was closed or open, a description of the item, the owner's name, location in the property room, and a note about whether the item could be returned to the owner. What we actually needed was an automated tracking system to help us maintain better control over each item and identify where it was at any given time."

According to Guman, automation has become the gold standard for police business. "It's everywhere—from automated 911 dispatches to property and evidence tracking. In our case, an automated system would provide a chain-of-custody trail that would help us meet the requirements for state certification for records retention. We wanted a system designed specifically for property and evidence, one that would allow us to sort by a variety of variables, such as by types of weapons, specific makes, etc."

Apprehending the Solution

Call says that conducting lots of online product research and talking with other police departments helped his department home in on the TAB FusionRMS Enterprise for Property and Evidence. "TAB's system was clearly the frontrunner," he said. "We compared it to other products on the market, and it was the only system that had the features we wanted for keeping our property and evidence under tight rein and for helping us with compliance. Coincidentally, our P&E officer (who has since been promoted) had also heard through the PD grapevine how effective the system was. The consensus out there was very positive.



"It has lived up to that reputation, too," says Call. "The TAB FusionRMS system has automated our entire chain of custody and made property and evidence tracking easier and more compliant."

Guman notes, "TAB FusionRMS' bar coding capability is helping us meet the State Department of Evidence Examination guidelines for records retention. This includes submitting reports to the state to notify them when new evidence is collected, as well as how and when evidence is disposed of. The system does all of this for us. It also notifies us automatically when evidence can be returned to owners or destroyed. For instance, items tied to serious crimes must be retained forever, while other items can be returned or destroyed after 7-10 years."

The system's signature pad is also vital to helping the department ensure the chain of custody. Guman says, "Anyone taking anything from the room must sign it out after scanning the bar code. At any given time, we know exactly where an item is—whether it's at a hearing, at the state lab, at home in our evidence room, returned to its owner or destroyed."

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“TAB FusionRMS fits right in”

The new TAB FusionRMS system has been embraced without hesitation because it allows law enforcement officers to continue to work the way they've always worked. Officers fill out a property report and court inventory form for each piece of evidence and submit it with associated information, like arrests—just like they always have.

“TAB FusionRMS fits right in, and we haven't been forced to change our processes,” says Guman. “The only real difference is that the evidence room is neat and organized. In fact, we were actually able to consolidate two rooms (one for bulk items and one for smaller items) into one, so we're saving space as well. We were also able to use an existing server with a Microsoft SQL Server database, so there was no additional infrastructure investment required. TAB imported our old records from Excel in minutes.”

Everything about using the TAB FusionRMS Enterprise for Property and Evidence is easy, according to Public Safety Officer Linda Vena, who recently took over P&E duties for the department. “I had to learn property and evidence protocol at the same time I was learning the new system,” she said. “But the system was very easy to learn. It's flexible, too. I can easily edit labels and communications like notifications to owners to pick up their property.”

Vena's been doing a lot of that lately, thanks to the system. “It makes it easy for me to keep up with court orders,” she said. “In just two months, I've closed out 30 court orders for return or destruction of property. Plus, I've been returning property that has been here since 1997 to owners and finders. When citizens call in to check if we happen to have missing property like a lost wallet, I can locate it quickly by calling up a specific time frame or their name. All around, the TAB system is helping us serve our citizens better, and that's why we're here.”

Upgrade your RM System with TAB FusionRMS

Want to see how TAB FusionRMS can streamline your records management system? We can help! [Visit our website](#) or call us for more information.

Surwannee River Quick Stats

TAB Customer:

Town of Westport Police Department
Westport, Connecticut

Challenge:

Eliminate misplaced and missing property and evidence and meet state certification guidelines for records retention.

Solution:

TAB FusionRMS Enterprise for Property and Evidence

Results:

- System provides complete control of the property and evidence chain of custody.
- System eliminates mishandled, lost and stolen evidence.
- Audit feature meets state certification requirements.
- Consolidating two property rooms into one saves space.



Technology
Solutions

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