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Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal Set to Launch FireFiles Statewide

After nearly two and a half years of ongoing development and painful budget cuts, the Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal is set to launch its first ever fire and arson investigation database. The Fire Investigation Division of the OSFM began working with Albanese Consulting, Inc. in 2000 analyzing the needs of the agency and its 23 investigators that are positioned strategically throughout the state. What they quickly came to find was that their team was unable to effectively communicate and deliver information and reporting both to and from investigators and administrators. The previous system was a spreadsheet and template-based file system. The investigation staff had to manually thumb through paper files to run searches on their data, look up suspects' past involvement and histories on cases and compile any type of statistical information. Further, investigative reports were being delivered in hard copies via regular mail that often meant days and weeks of sending reports back and forth across the state to get a final approval. Terry Ford, Director, remarked, "We found it very difficult and time consuming to manage investigators, generate statistics and compile summary reports for administrators. FireFiles offered a solution that solved these problems."

"After a few meetings and some preliminary analysis, we were quickly able to determine that the State had to make a stronger attempt at embracing technology to efficiently perform their jobs," said Albanese Consulting President, Peter Albanese. "Further, our market research began to show us that this was a need that was extremely common in the fire investigation industry. We were staring at a very significant opportunity in a market that has very few direct competitors." So, in conjunction with the Illinois OSFM, Albanese Consulting began to develop the database system that is now known across the world as FireFiles Fire & Arson Investigation Software.

FireFiles was launched to the general public early in 2001; however, due to severely tight economic conditions and a frozen budget for the OSFM, they were unable to gain budget approval on a final round of customizations until June of 2003. Some very important improvements were made to the newest version of FireFiles including additional NFIRS

compatibility as well as a hot sync feature. The hot sync feature will give field investigators that are not connected to the central OSFM database to work a case on a stand-alone machine. On a regular basis, those field investigators will be able to run a hot sync process to update the master database in Springfield as well as deliver investigative reports electronically to approval users. Case tracking and suspect searches will be completed very quickly and accurately with the FireFiles database system, and those days of rummaging through filing cabinets for summary reports will come to a happy end.

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