



Customer Success Story
**USAF Wildland
Fire Branch**

How a Custom Inventory Management Solution Improved Decision Making and Equipment Sharing

Bespoke Inventory Solution Improves Accountability in Civil Operations

The US Air Force Wildland Fire Branch (AFWFB), part of the Air Force Civil Engineer Center Environmental Directorate, ensures military readiness to reduce and respond to wildfire threats and other natural disasters. As a distributed organization with a network of fourteen offices and wildland support modules across the country, supported by reciprocal relationships with local towns, cities, and institutions as well as the Army and other Federal agencies, AFWFB needs accurate visibility into the more than 2,000 assets in its equipment inventory to maintain a state of perpetual readiness.

Strict Federal security and compliance requirements restricted AFWFB to SharePoint, with inventory tracking and maintenance conducted with Excel spreadsheets and email. At scale, spreadsheets tend to be inefficient, prone to errors, difficult for collaboration, and difficult to translate into actionable insight. Added to this, not every location tracked inventory in the same way, inventory and use of one-time-use items such as fire extinguishers were often inaccurate, and record-keeping about maintenance was inconsistent.

“It was chaos,” notes Brent Larson, Planning, Programming, Budget & Execution Manager, “There was no way to keep everything straight. We didn’t know what assets we had and there was no tracking of maintenance.” Brent knew that RhyBus solutions run seamlessly on Microsoft 365 and on-premise SharePoint and having worked with Rhybus on a SharePoint project in another Federal Agency, he opened the door for discussions.

“Initially, we didn’t really know what we needed,” notes Brent, “Rhybus helped us understand the capabilities of SharePoint and what it was we actually needed. They were excellent at asking questions, which in the end resulted in so much more benefit that we received out of the system.”

Through these discussions, AFWFB was able to articulate the need for a centralized process to track various activities for storing the entire inventory, manage its maintenance lifecycle, including end-of-life and replacements, as well as visibility over its equipment sharing program.

“We worked very closely with Rhybus on this project. They were excellent at asking questions and were very intuitive about the end goal, without me even understanding it, helping lead us down a path towards the best solution.”

The Rhybus Difference

- **Asset Audit in Hours From Weeks**
- **End-to-End Equipment Lifecycle Visibility**
- **Standardized Maintenance Checklists**
- **Simplified Compliance**





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Real-Time Inventory Tracking

“No matter where I am in the country, I can look up a piece of equipment and report on it. I have peace of mind to be able to show that we were accountable for that equipment to meet the requirements of the Federal government.”

As a collaborative and distributed operation, assets and equipment are spread and shared all across the United States, including Alaska. AFWFB needed to be able to set a home base for each asset, to manage relevant licenses and permits, as well as to coordinate and track the movement and utilization of equipment

on loan - features not inherent to most inventory management solutions. With IMS, inventory tracking became, in Brent's words, “almost instantaneous,” helping to “accomplish everything that we needed.”

“With IMS, we know exactly where everything is all the time. We know exactly what maintenance has occurred on it. We know how old it is and when we need to replace it.”

For equipment and vehicles there are regulations that have to be followed for the Federal government. If there's an item that's \$5,000 or more in value, it has to be accounted for at all times - something that wasn't reliable before IMS. “Now, we have one central information where we can know exactly where an item is and have all the detailed information on hand.” IMS was also able to improve the replenishment schedule for one-time use personal protective equipment such as fire extinguishers.

The IMS system has provided a new level of accountability over high-value assets. Whereas an audit would have taken

in-person checks to account for all 2,000 assets across 14 locations, the same information can now be printed out and reviewed in a matter of hours, saving time and money on an ongoing basis.

Unified Platform for Entire Operation

With assets, teams, and employees spread all across the country, having a central inventory management system makes it possible to keep data up to date - but that only happens when users are motivated to use a new system.

Rhybus worked closely with AFWFB to develop a custom solution that would be both easier and faster for employees to work with - key motivators to success. Through storyboards and early prototype testing, Rhybus presented an intuitive dashboard that would allow employees to view inventory, manage maintenance, and support collaborative engagement intra and inter-module for equipment sharing. The IMS system developed by

Rhybus is intuitive, streamlining initial adoption and eliminating the need for ongoing training.

“The personnel using the system on a daily basis had some trepidation,” notes Brent, “But they quickly realized how user-friendly the system was and how much data was there for them to see and utilize.”

“The system was extremely user-friendly and very intuitive. We loved it, from the moment it rolled out.”

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Transparent Maintenance Records

In addition to end-to-end visibility over the equipment, the new AFWFB Inventory Management System provides transparency into its current state, historical maintenance records, and end-of-life replacements. For an operation that previously relied only on word of mouth for replenishments and replacements, this has allowed AFWFB to improve its planning and decision making processes.

The IMS system captures maintenance records, checklists, and photos with timestamp and location data to assist in audits. The system is also able to compile this information into a variety of reports, including reports on maintenance history, maintenance quality assurance checks, equipment utilization, and even the cost of assets at a particular location.

“As equipment is aging, we recognize it leads to more and more maintenance issues,” notes Brent. “We were able to build in a cost system for each asset and also a lifespan.” With greater data on cost of equipment, equipment lifecycle, and location usage, AFWFB is able to make data-driven decisions about its modules and its purchasing decisions.

The system created and standardized checklists across various maintenance activities to ensure that the correct process was followed for quality assurance and transparency between teams and employees. “It’s very clear now how to move forward with each of our assets,” notes Brent.



“Since developing the custom IMS system, AFWFB has expanded the partnership with Idea Entity to include several other custom projects to support the operation. “Even when you are unclear on your side, Idea Entity will sit down and work with you and all of a sudden they have an idea and a plan. That’s the level of expertise that they have.”