

Cities get help going paper-free

Electronic system should streamline recordkeeping, give public better access

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It's a lofty goal: To have a nearly paperless office.

And the cities of Kennewick and Richland already are working on it with the help of an Olympia-based firm.

The cities are gradually moving to an electronic data management system that will provide quick access to public documents, prevent duplicate storage and make

updating the records a cinch. Plus, it will free up a lot of physical space that is used for maintaining old files and records.

ImageSource began assessing Kennewick's needs for streamlining its information systems in 2006. The company found out that duplication of files was a major problem, said company spokeswoman Debbie Horton.

Kennewick soon commissioned ImageSource to develop and install the system in the City Clerk's Office. And the results of the \$600,000 project have made city officials smile.

The new system greatly improved the internal process of putting together the city council

agenda reports, said Marie Mosley, Kennewick's executive director for support services.

The documents are no longer physically sent back and forth to various offices for changes and approvals, she said.

The system was integrated with the city's financial system earlier in the year, helping create electronic timecards. That's made payroll processing less labor intensive and more accurate, Horton said.

Impressed with Kennewick's success, Richland also sought ImageSource's help.

Debbie Barham, Richland's chief deputy city clerk, said ImageSource

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Shula Dunning, deputy Kennewick city clerk, enters information about easements from 2002 before scanning them with a new ImageSource system. The scanner, which is to Dunning's left, allows full text searches of scanned documents. The city is scanning archived documents to become a virtually paperless office.

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recently assessed the city's needs to improve information flows across departments.

Like Kennewick, Richland wants to integrate loads of information into a big repository of records for quick retrieval and better customer service. That has been the goal for a long time, she said.

Kennewick City Manager Bob Hammond said he looks forward to the day when all of the city's information systems, including permits, contracts,

operations and maintenance, and other systems will be meshed together.

He expects it will improve efficiencies and allow the city to deliver more services with fewer resources. He noted the city has had to cut 13 positions in the last three years because of budget constraints.

Hammond says residents will be able to go to the city's website and apply for permits and jobs, sign up for recreation classes, check contract information or even get a copy of a public record. "It'll be a one-

stop shop," he said.

In the next five years, Kennewick expects to integrate the work of different departments. To help make the switch to a more efficient system of information management, city employees are scanning all the needed documents.

It may take years before the transition is complete, but its benefits are evident everyday, Mosley said.

She said the success of the project depends on re-training employees so that they can learn to do their work in a new way

without using paper, she said.

Because they are used to the traditional way of working, they're afraid of losing data while working online, she said.

Managing information is essential to providing good services and accountability, she said.

And Mosley said that felling fewer trees will be another of the many benefits.

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