

Knowledge Management: For Your Information

Story and Photo by Jess Levenson

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Will Burgess has the formidable task of guiding the New England District's information and business practices into the 21st Century.

As the District's Knowledge Management Officer, Burgess is responsible for streamlining the District's entire universe of information and developing workable policies and practices, otherwise known as Knowledge Management Initiatives (KMI's). "I help achieve solutions through a happy medium of people, technology and processes," he summarized. "The end result is information gets to the right people, at the right time, in the right way."

Dave Margolis, Engineering Branch Chief, collaborates with Burgess as a member of the KMI development working group. He believes the organization can improve its management of information. "People spend an inordinate amount of time tracking things down," Margolis assessed. "It's incredibly inefficient."

The oft-used shared drive system is the KMI development group's number one priority, as well as their toughest task. "The shared drive has issues with file-naming, file folders, file structures, and the interface, among other things," Margolis elaborated.

Other issues on the horizon include managing data from many systems used by the District, such as CEFMS and P2, as well as administrative files like conference requests, overtime forms and timekeeper files. Big picture concerns include freeing up organizational stovepipes and absorbing experiential knowledge from the retiring workforce.

The project's timeline is to be determined, according to Burgess. In the interim, he is working to establish roles and responsibilities for the Knowledge Management process, as well as develop a training plan. "This project requires patience and cooperation," he acknowledged. "It all sounds good on paper, but its success boils down to personal discipline and habit-building."

Knowledge Management initiatives have succeeded for other Corps programs. "St. Louis District had a 'Clean-up Day' where they gave employees four hours to destroy all of their obsolete physical documents," said Burgess. "They literally threw away tons of paper."

Margolis added, "In FUDS [Formerly Used Defense Sites], we hired a contractor to digitize all our files and put our documents into a national file structure. It became easier to find things and deal with version control."

"Knowledge Management is not a solution," Burgess cautioned. "There's no end-all, be-all solution to risk and mistakes. Knowledge Management evolves over time and grows from both ends of the organization."