


Customer Segment Story: MUNICIPALITIES

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Vital records protection is essential to ensure that the details of the past are not destroyed, forgotten, discarded or altered. Business records such as titles, contracts, lease agreements, financial statements and many other important documents need to be protected against fire, flood and other types of disasters. Personal records that may include insurance policies, deeds to land rights, or even family photos or negatives should also be protected from destruction by the best possible means. One especially important type of document that needs 100% protection is a governmental document. All levels of the government should be prepared as best as possible to protect our vital public records.

From the Constitution of the United States of America to John Doe's parking ticket in Mobridge, South Dakota, important government documents should be kept in fireproof file cabinets, safes or vaults. Federal, state and local governments all have their own specific rules and regulations when it comes to vital records protection.

The town of Cape Carteret on the coast of North Carolina is subject to such state regulations regarding records protection because of its proximity to the ocean and the possibility of a hurricane hitting the coast and destroying everything in its path, including very important files and documents not properly secured. Carol Fox, deputy clerk for Cape Carteret, says that "...minutes from the bi-monthly board meetings, personnel records, financial documents, historic town maps, and other permanent records are kept in our four 4-drawer FireKing fireproof file cabinets. Thankfully, we purchased these proactively rather than reactively to a disaster where we could have lost very important municipal documents."

Unfortunately, not all municipalities have such specified regulation as to what needs to be protected and in what matter they are to be shielded from destruction. For example, the small town of Elida, New Mexico, with less than 500 residents, does not have any local, state or federal rules for vital record protection. But rather than wait for a disaster or a law to affect this small community, they have purchased one 4-drawer lateral FireKing fireproof file cabinet to reside in the town's courthouse. There, traffic citations and other important court documents are kept safe from destruction by fire or other disaster. Sandra Monks, Elida's Town Clerk, comments on the necessity of keeping important documents safe:

“We have one FireKing filing cabinet in our courtroom that holds some traffic citations and a few important court documents. To be honest, I’m not sure that one is enough. We have many other important records, that if destroyed, would be a real headache trying to replace.”

On the other end of the spectrum, there are local government offices that keep all records in fireproof file cabinets. Fran Leal, Office Manager for the town of Sterling in northwest Illinois, arranged for complete protection of all documents in her office.

“Here in Sterling, we started with one 4-drawer FireKing file cabinet for items like payroll records, clerk minutes and other important documents,” Leal said. “After that, we kept buying one after the other to ensure that the rest of the documents that were less vital, but still very important, be secured from fire damage. Now, all our office documents are kept in the FireKing file cabinets. Also, any of our non-essential daily documents are backed up on disk, which are in turn stored in the fireproof containers. It gives us, as a town office, a little piece of mind knowing that the documents are secure and will not need to be replaced following a disaster.”

Not all municipalities have made proactive purchases of FireKing fireproof safes or file cabinets. And in some cases, those municipalities have paid the price. In April of 2002, for instance, a devastating fire destroyed nearly everything in the municipal offices of Ovid, Colorado. The only items salvaged from the ashes were those that were stored in the few small fireproof safes they had at the time.

“It was a huge mess. We were not properly prepared or protected at all. Thousands of important documents were gone forever after that day,” commented Carol Dunker, Town Clerk of Ovid, CO.

Since then, Ovid has purchased FireKing fireproof file cabinets to house all of their important documents including employee records, state information, legal documents, information regarding the town’s water and sewage systems, budgets and other fiscal information, as well as records that are not considered vital, but worth keeping in a safe and protected place.

A more recent example of a town losing almost everything due to fire damage happened on May 27th, 2003. The municipal building in Doniphan, MO housed the clerk’s office, courthouse, mayor’s office, police station and prison. On that particular day, a prisoner stuck a piece of lead in a socket to create a flame for the purposes

of lighting a cigarette. A few moments later the fire in the walls behind the socket spread throughout the building, eventually causing major structural damage.

Barbara Jarrett, City Clerk in Doniphan, MO at the time, speaks about the damage caused by the fire:

“It was a real disaster. All of the prisoners had to be relocated to another facility while the fire ravaged the building. After the fire was extinguished and we could assess the actual damage, we found that about 95% of all the documents had been destroyed. Even the ones in the fireproof containers were badly damaged because of smoke and water entering the container. Since the fire, we have purchased all FireKing products for the office and installed a sprinkler system to prevent anything like this happening in the future. Hopefully, we won’t have to put them to the test.”

All governmental agencies and municipalities should be prepared and protected for a disaster of any kind. Keeping records secure and intact is essential to moving forward in a catastrophe. FireKing fireproof file cabinets and safes help maintain the future security of our towns, cities, states and our country.

Mayor William Rosenblatt of the Village of Loch Arbour in New Jersey understands the need for vital record protection.

“Although we have never lost any documents because of a fire, I fully appreciated the need for a way to secure them,” commented Rosenblatt. “Document recovery can prove to be an impossible task after a disaster. I’ve been mayor of this small town for nearly ten years and can only imagine the amount of work that would be required to restore or replace some of the documents that can be as old as 50 years. In my opinion, every office, not just a governmental office should have at least one fireproof container for the most vital records.”