



# OUTSTANDING IN EDMONTON

City's fleet services division takes home awards for excellence in fleet management



**W**hat makes the City of Edmonton's Fleet Services division such a winner on the awards circuit, as well as with its internal and external customers?

"Leadership! You need good leaders, managers, supervisors and foremen, that others are willing to follow," says Steve Rapanos, director, City of Edmonton Fleet Services, who with Bill Horne, supervisor, Fleet Safety, City of Edmonton Fleet Services, took home two of the NAFA Fleet Association's seven Fleet Excellence Awards in April 2013. "Short-term, you can aggressively force change, but you'll never get long-term commitment or ongoing improvements."

### So what makes a good leader?

"You need the three Cs! You have to set a tone and create an environment of competence, caring and concern—you have to listen to your people and be accessible to them," says Rapanos. "Whether you want to cut costs or boost your safety performance, you need good leaders to integrate that mindset into the culture."

Respectively, Rapanos and Horne won NAFA Flexys for Outstanding Achievement in Public Fleet Management, and Excellence in Public Fleet Safety. In 2012, the City of Edmonton's fleet was also ranked in the top 20 of the 100 Best Fleets for developing innovative solutions to complex mechanical, fabrication and engineering challenges and also made the 2011 list of North America's 100 Best Fleets. The 100 Best Fleets awards are sponsored by Tom C Johnson, an author and consultant.

Rapanos spent 25 years with the City of Edmonton's Emergency Medical Services, which included 10 years as EMS Chief. He then left to tackle change in Fleet Services, where he combines a range of soft skills with high-tech tools and sophisticated but simple systems. His 700 employees work out of 15 shops across Edmonton, where they maintain and repair 4,700 vehicles and pieces of equipment) worth about \$660 million and operated by more than 6,000 drivers. In addition, they procure equipment and vehicles, while also administering the fleet, managing fuel and fabricating a variety of customized fleet products, from hand rails to snow plows. Together, they take care of a fleet that

runs the gamut from transit buses, waste trucks and ice resurfacers to emergency response vehicles such as police cars, ambulances and fire trucks.

"The shop floor is a very important place in our world," says Rapanos. "It's where the work that keeps these vehicles safe and operational gets done, but it's also where costs are incurred and employees are exposed to a range of hazards."

Rapanos and his team demand accountability and results, which means they do keep score in terms of measuring and tracking data and results. Direct feedback from fire and ambulance crews as well as other fleet users ensures Fleet Services employees are aware of the impact they have on their colleagues and their direct connection to citizens while operating behind the scenes.

### Information is critical

"Whatever you're trying to achieve, you have to keep score or you're not managing your business!" says Rapanos. "We're responsible for maintaining and repairing more than 200 types of vehicle, each of which has 10,000 to 15,000 working parts—we can't plan or manage what we do without instant access to real-time data."



**"You need the three Cs! You have to set a tone and create an environment of competence, caring and concern—you have to listen to your people and be accessible to them," says Rapanos."**

After an executive assessment provided insights on the gaps and how Fleet Services was received and perceived by internal and external clients, it became apparent the existing information system was inadequate. Given the scope and complexity of Fleet Services' operations, two years ago, the Fleet Services division made a significant investment in the fleet-centric AssetWorks M5, which included software, hardware upgrades/replacements, implementation and training.

"About 70 percent of our staff relies on AssetWorks M5 directly or indirectly—it does a tremendous amount of heavy lifting in terms of both data and analysis," says Rapanos.

The day AssetWorks M5 went live, no one in Fleet Services stood up and said "I love it!" Chances are, few would react that way today. But it has certainly put the data required to effectively run the business at employees' fingertips.

Because AssetWorks M5 has improved reporting and facilitated control, Fleet Services saves \$700,000 a year thanks to a 30 percent reduction in overtime. Increasing wrench time—the portion of total available time spent on repairs—by nine percent also cut costs by \$1.9 million annually because there is a \$200,000 saving for every one percent improvement in wrench time.

Fleet Services switched from Type A to Type B diesel fuel and decommissioned trolleys which facilitated access for larger fuel delivery trucks. This allowed Fleet Services to capitalize on larger volume fuel drops that produced bulk fuel purchase savings and reduced delivery costs for total annual savings of about \$700,000 a year.

Implementing a fluids analysis program saves yet another \$500,000 annually. Tests performed during routine preventive maintenance provide meaningful and accurate information on lubricant and machine condition. By tracking the results over the lifetime of a piece of equipment, Fleet Services can identify trends to help eliminate costly repairs and associated downtime.

In one more example, improving the bus refurbishment process drives \$400,000 a year out of the budget by reducing parts and labour costs by 30 percent. In the past, buses were refurbished at three different garages



es, each with their own processes and subsequently outcomes. Autobody technicians worked to standardize and consolidate processes, which included creating a standard bill of material for each unit, implementing an assembly line process and the bulk purchase of aluminum panels.

Back in 2008, Fleet Services worked with the City of Edmonton's Materials Management Branch to implement a Light-Duty Vehicle Strategic Sourcing Project, which standardized the light-duty fleet into 16 major categories with 20 different models—down from 52 models. This also resulted in a \$300,000 yearly cost saving and supported all city departments in right-sizing vehicles, while improving their procurement process and vendor management.

### Safety first

In Fleet Services, employee safety is key because chemical, mechanical and environmental risks as well as driving hazards abound. While employees spend the bulk of their time maintaining and repairing vehicles, they also drive them to test the repairs or ferry them to another location. The safety strategy is multi-pronged, with Rapanos and Horne relying on employees' powers of observation and initiative as a first line of defence.

For instance, in one large shop, the heater blew out every time the front door opened on a windy day. With outdoor temperatures often dropping below -20°C, a thin film of ice quickly formed on the concrete floors where it remained until maintenance swung by to reignite the heater.

After six years of this, an employee said to Rapanos in passing, "Those heaters are driving us crazy!" A new heater and wall-mounted restart button now ensure a quick relight as required.

On another occasion, an employee complained his shop had yet to receive the \$2,800 over-size, heavy-duty rubber curtain that would protect employees and equipment from the overspray when steam cleaning. It had been on the books for four months.

"Not having that \$2,800 curtain in a shop with 65 employees and \$450,000 worth of equipment is a false economy. If it improves

safety and efficiency, get it done," says Rapanos. "Our employees are charged with constantly checking that items on the to-do lists get done. If there's a roadblock step up and escalate it."

To inspire continuous improvement, drive initiative and have employees take responsibility, they get the tools, training and support they need. Of course, employees report to supervisors and foreman, but they also have access to senior managers, including Rapanos and Horne, via their direct phone lines and email addresses. They want to know if someone has a concern, an idea or wants to share a success.

Rapanos and Horne don't want a culture that tolerates or puts up with a potentially dangerous situation nor do they want a culture where passing the buck is acceptable. It's always easier to blame the maintenance worker who relights the heater, the purchasing administrator who delays the purchase order or the object that got in the way of the vehicle.



**"We need to acknowledge good and bad behaviour," says Horne, whose safety officers offer words of encouragement and appreciation as well as Tim Horton's gift cards when they see employees acting safely. "You need the carrot and the stick, but you need to apply them fairly and equitably."**

"We can't be locked into what we did five years ago. Everything evolves," says Rapanos. "If you have good people and a bad process or system, the bad system wins every time."

When Horne took over as supervisor, fleet safety, in December 2010, he walked into an organization that was about to undergo a provincial audit to ensure the fleet's compliance with the National Safety Code. Those uniform, minimum national safety standards for commercial vehicles were developed in 1988 by federal, provincial and territorial governments in consultation with trucking, labour and safety organizations. They are now law in most provinces.

After the three-day audit, Horne implemented action items around driver safety that included introducing the City of Edmonton's 6,000 drivers to the National Safety Code and replacing the 10-year-old driver training program. Since August 2012, 700 Fleet Services employees have completed 18,128 personnel hours in fleet-related technical, safety and operational training. The bulk of the training was delivered in class, to groups of 30 to 50 at a time. Exams were administered after each component with a passing grade of 75 percent required to earn or keep the necessary City of Edmonton driving permit.

Horne, who came to Fleet Services after spending 25 years in law enforcement, also launched a cultural shift that uses the word "collision" instead of "accident", which suggests it "just happened" and "it's no big deal". Collisions are preventable and Horne believes it's a necessary, albeit "baby" step in changing how employees think and behave.

"After a collision, we'll work with the driver to identify what they can do differently to prevent a reoccurrence," says Horne. "Again, it's about taking responsibility for the outcome."

"We need to acknowledge good and bad behaviour," says Horne, whose safety officers offer words of encouragement and appreciation as well as Tim Horton's gift cards when they see employees acting safely. "You need the carrot and the stick, but you need to apply them fairly and equitably." **C.A.R.**