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WHITEMAN AIR FORCE BASE KEEPS THE B-2 BOMBER IN THE AIR AND TOOLING IN THEIR SHOP

The job of keeping the Air Force's squadron of B-2 bombers in flying condition falls to the maintenance crew at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri. It's a job that impacts our nation's security, and it can't be done without tools. The Air Force has 21 of the multi-role heavy bombers, and each one cost about \$1.3 billion to build. Keeping up with them takes about 10,000 tools and 2,000 or so maintenance manuals.

With all that money on the line, the ability to track those tools and other equipment needed to be easy and accurate. It was neither. So Whiteman officials turned to the CribMaster Inventory Management System. CribMaster, which uses bar coding and radio-frequency scanners to track where tools are and who's using them, has eliminated the handwritten notes that were being used to check out tools to maintenance crew in the 21 hangars.

Sgt. Bob Goddard, the consolidated tool kits custodian who's in charge of keeping track of tools used on the B-2, explained that the Air Force unit used to use a chip system to show where the tools were. Whenever a tool was taken from a toolcrib, it was replaced by a round piece of metal that provided information about where the tool was and for what it was being used. The information was all listed by hand – often incomplete, in scraggly writing, or not filled out at all – on about 1,000 paper receipts per shift.

Since CribMaster got up and running in March, however, Goddard's staff of about 30 toolcrib attendants uses radio-frequency scanners to scan an employee number – which includes information about the employee's rank, squadron, job and shift – and scan a bar code that is assigned to each tool or kit. In all, the transaction takes a few seconds. "We're probably 75 percent faster than we used to be. It's a huge jump," Goddard said.

The best part, however, is that Goddard himself saves about three hours a day poring over all those handwritten receipts trying to figure out what tools are still out and where they are. That used to be done once on each of the three shifts in the maintenance area every day. Now, in a matter of seconds, CribMaster creates a report on each shift that shows what tools are out at that moment and who has them. The report also shows the phone number of the tool-holder's shop so a toolcrib attendant can call and see to it that the tool is returned. "It's not that we're losing fewer things," Goddard said. "It's that we instantaneously know who has it, where it was last at."

CribMaster, which was created specifically to manage tools in toolcribs, includes a broad range of capabilities that help manage tools. It operates automated vending machines, creates purchase orders, generates detailed standard and custom reports, and tracks maintenance of all types of assets in any type of machine shop. The system is flexible enough, however, to fit whatever needs a shop might have. Goddard, for example, was most interested in fast access to information about where his tools were. He also needed a way to track the 2,000 maintenance manuals that machinists use to keep the B-2 flying. Like the tools, the manuals used to be checked out using written receipts that were hard to read or not filled out. Now, they're bar-coded just like the tools, and the information is recorded instantly using the RF scanners. "It's working out excellently," Goddard said.

Goddard also wanted a system that would work with the way his tools already were identified. The B-2 tools had location numbers etched into them and he didn't want to start that process all over again. The staff at WinWare Inc., the Marietta, Georgia-based company that created CribMaster, designed a system that accepted the existing location numbers as the new bar-code identification numbers. "It allowed us not to have

to do anything to our tools,” Goddard said. CribMaster, a Windows-based application, also accepted existing data that were in Goddard’s Excel database.

Though the system has been in place only a few months, the reaction to it has been positive. Several other divisions at Whiteman have called or visited looking for a demonstration, and Whiteman officials are considering purchasing a site license so CribMaster can be used throughout the base. “It sells itself,” Goddard said of how popular the program has become.

The bar-code system, he said, “allows trend analysis, different custom reporting, allows you to track all your tools instantaneously, and it’s got a tireless database.” Goddard has plans to use more of CribMaster’s capabilities as time goes on. He would like to see more use of the supply tracking capabilities, and is looking into getting a laptop computer that could be taken – along with the necessary tools – wherever in the world the B-2 is deployed.

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