



Technology to the Rescue: Scheduling Software Solves Public Safety Pains



Learn how software like TCP's Aladtec Scheduling can solve many common pain points.

Public safety workers such as firefighters, police officers and other emergency responders work around the clock. To ensure public safety, your schedules and staffing levels must work around the clock, too. It's not just a matter of having the right number of people available to cover shifts, but having the necessary skills, experience and combination of job ranks.

It may not be pleasant when a worker misses their shift at a retail outlet or restaurant. But not having the right mix and number of employees on duty can have life-or-death implications in public safety. Leaving schedule creation to a less-than-modern system can be time-consuming at best and disastrous at worst.



Deputy Chief Tom Jukes understands the dilemma that outdated systems cause. When he joined the Tsuut'ina Nation Fire Rescue Service, department leaders were [building monthly schedules](#) on spreadsheets.

"It was inefficient as it took up a lot of time and also made scheduling coverage for book-offs difficult as it meant phoning, texting or e-mailing all of the part-time employees. A switch was needed to reduce administration time," Jukes said.

Like the Tsuut'ina Nation's Fire Rescue Service, many local public safety agencies are starting to see that they must look to scheduling software for assistance in meeting this critical need.

According to [research from Accenture](#), "over 85% of public safety respondents agree that their organizations' business and technology strategies are becoming inseparable – even indistinguishable...agencies need to take critical decisions like how to embrace the cloud, how to remove embedded siloes and harness the power of platforms, and

how to get to grips with the mass of data now available to them."

Indeed, a sound process and strategy for scheduling is essential for any public safety organization. Without the right tools for scheduling employee shifts, a range of complications can occur, leaving your department short-staffed or burdened with an outsized overtime expense, or both.



Complex workforce scheduling needs

Few, if any, public safety employees are clocking in a “9 to 5” shift. In fact, the employees and administrators are working 24/7 to ensure public safety. The long hours are only part of what makes these schedules so complex. Other unique elements in creating public safety schedules include:

- Frequent changes and shift callouts
- Shift requirements related to rank and qualification
- Wide variety of shift rotations
- Overtime equity and requirements
- Accountability for missed shifts and communication

Public safety is also one of the [most unionized industries in America](#). Not only do these jobs demand a high level of commitment, schedules for public safety employees must also meet union and regulatory requirements.

Tackle employee schedules with technology

When deciding how to create and manage complex schedules, agencies need to ensure that they're using modern scheduling software systems and that those systems can adapt to their unique needs. Those modern systems are a key to guaranteeing everyone has the data and information they need and at the right time.

As you consider a solution for your agency, look for features that reinforce communication and empower your teams to deliver the best service and care possible.

Replace whiteboards and spreadsheets with online schedules

Before moving to an online system, officer scheduling at the University of North Dakota Police Department happened with ink on plastic. The schedule was [created and updated on a whiteboard in the squad room](#) – with one color for vacation and another for sick leave. While the format was simple, it made it difficult for supervisors and officers to know who was working

and when – unless they were onsite and could look at the whiteboard. That changed when the department switched to Aladtec. Among other advantages, the schedule is now visible online. Officers appreciate that they see when they're working and can easily request vacation from their phone or from the car computer.

Additionally, features like coverage alerts can notify qualified workers in the agency of open shifts and allow them to sign up—no phone calls or texts required! For agencies that want to offer coverage alerts based on seniority or overtime hours, the alerts can be staggered.

Improve transparency and accountability for shifts

Without workforce scheduling software, agencies may run into an employee vs. manager version of who said what. A manager may say the employee agreed to work a shift, but after a “no show” for the shift the employee claims they never said they’d work the shift. With visibility into live schedules and helpful tools like a time-and-date stamp in the system, it’s possible to see shift changes, communications that were sent and who signed up for what shift.

Use shift rotations to set up standard schedules

Different agencies have different shift rotations. One agency may require a 24/48 shift rotation, while others follow a Panama schedule or a 2-2-3 shift rotation. Still others might even have a 24-week rotation in place. The right technology will allow you the flexibility to develop custom shift rotations based on your rules and needs. Once shift rotations are entered, a scheduling system like Aladtec can repeat that rotation for up to two years. The person managing the schedule can link the employee to that rotation and the system will notify you if they have conflicts.



Complicated payroll calculations

In the world of public safety, paid overtime is common and necessary to protect the public. With a large or completely shift-based workforce, managing overtime to limit unnecessary shift overages can be challenging. The nuances of public safety shifts make overtime more complicated than the average industry.

For example, a typical shift worker earns overtime based on a 40-hour work week. But that's not necessarily the case in public safety. Depending on the agency, role and union requirements overtime may be calculated based on hours in a month or a different time period. Overtime rules may also be based on holiday pay rates when workers earn additional pay, regardless of whether they're working overtime.

Another element impacting public safety payroll calculations are complicated shift differentials. In this sector it's common for employees to earn different rates based on the shift they work. Confirming the correct pay rate for each shift is necessary to ensure employees are correctly paid.

Public safety agencies also may have multiple pay periods within the organization, as well as different categories of pay. For example, volunteers are paid for the shifts they work but do not receive benefits. Employees can also receive pay for personal time, paid time off and hazard pay. The accrual and balances are unique to each employee, making management and tracking difficult without technology.

Sample use case...

Planning for FLSA overtime pay

For fire departments, FLSA overtime cycles may need to be defined differently than their regular pay period cycle. With Aladtec, pay profiles can be used to define the FLSA overtime cycle, which can overlap with different pay periods.

Customize and automate payroll

Valuable work time is wasted when agencies use manual or outdated systems for tracking time and calculating payroll. These methods of running and collecting payroll require time collection, review and data calculations. Unnecessary steps detract from other work, waste time and are often the root of errors.

Software offers multiple ways to systematize these important payroll processes:

Automate time tracking and calculations

Scheduling software like Aladtec allows agencies to put rules in place to keep people from working excessive hours or unapproved overtime. These can be customized based on each agency's definition of overtime or union requirements. For example, an agency can set up quad-weekly overtime to paying overtime based on a four-week total instead of your usual 40-hours per week standard. It's also possible to

save backend headaches by setting work limits based on total hours or within a time period.

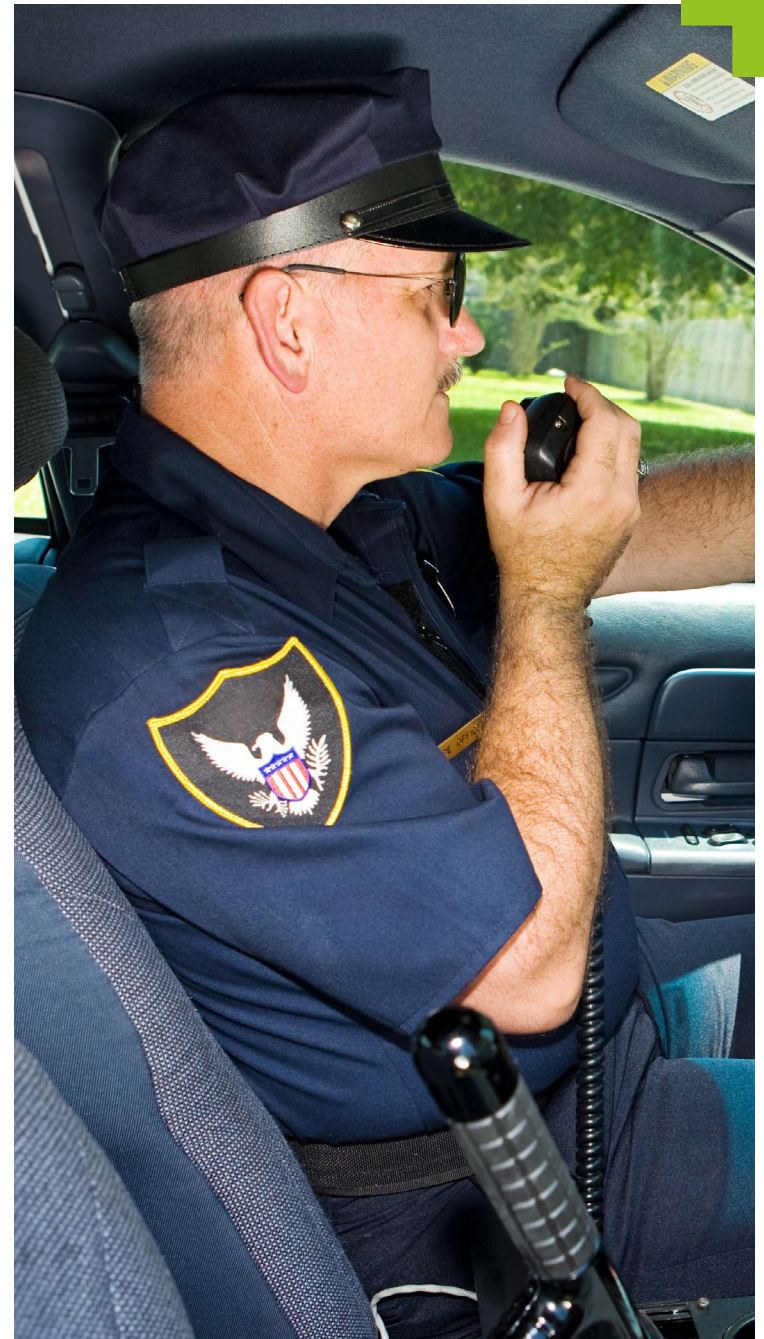
Implement pay periods, profiles and pay rates

We know that agencies have multiple factors at play for any given pay period. By implementing pay periods, pay profiles and pay rates based on employee groups (e.g. volunteers vs career officers), local public safety agencies can improve their scheduling process. The system makes it easy to define the pay profile by type of overtime, holiday or shift differential as well as defining the type of time or time off to ensure it is accurately accounted for in payroll. Once an employee is ready to submit hours for manager approval, they can easily do so via the system.

Comprehensive certification requirements

Public confidence is an essential requirement for local safety systems. Part of that comes from citizens trusting your agency is ensuring that employees maintain required certifications based on their role. Tracking the validity and expiration dates of the qualifications each person holds is crucial to uphold your organizations policy to either bench employees with expired certifications or allow a grace period depending on the agency policy.

Ensuring up-to-date accreditations is not the only reason to track certifications. Agencies also need to confirm that each shift meets requirements for the number of certified professionals working that shift. For example, EMS shifts must be staffed with required number of EMTs and paramedics.

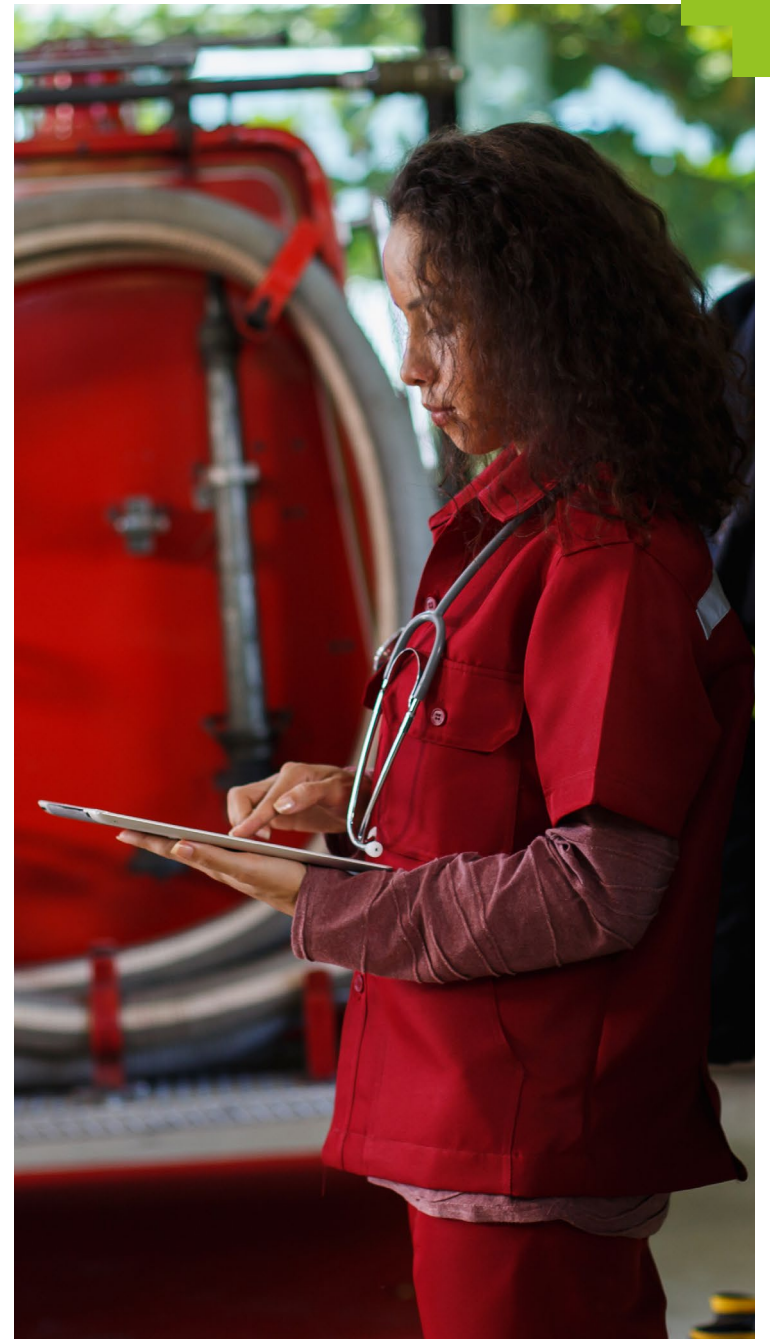


Streamline tracking and forms

Obviously, a paper calendar is not going to cut it for tracking numerous certification expiration dates across an entire agency's workforce. Often, compliance with regulations is required and can create additional complexities. Thankfully, technology offers a way to match certifications to schedule requirements.

Track license and certification expirations

An online system provides the solution you need to track issue and renewal dates for credentials. Additionally, the system provides the perfect place for employees or managers to upload licenses to securely store proof of certification. With dates in the system, managers get a notification if an employee's certification is expired or nearing expiration. This advance notice reduces potential downtime when someone doesn't meet shift requirements.



Assign employees based on qualifications

With a system like Aladtec in place, it's easy to ensure only qualified employees who hold necessary and current certifications are allowed to pick up shifts. For example, while all paramedics are EMTs, not all EMTs are paramedics. With Aladtec, it's possible to make sure employees are qualified for positions. Similarly, it's impossible to assign a shift if someone isn't qualified – meaning a scheduler couldn't assign an EMT to a paramedic position by mistake.

Implement electronic forms

Public safety organizations have an abundance of forms related to required safety checks. Completing and storing these forms can become a huge hassle if not streamlined. By digitizing these forms with solutions like Aladtec's online forms, agencies can eliminate the need for paper processes, manual routing and standalone applications. Forms automatically create a data repository that can be used for advanced reporting and filtering. A library of 200+ forms make it easy to perform routine maintenance checks and supply inventories.

Customer use case...

A firefighter at New Albany (IN) Fire Department, noticed an immediate impact after his organization started using Aladtec, "We not only took our scheduling online, but we were also able to [eliminate 95 percent of our paperwork](#) by utilizing the forms section of the program."

Conclusion

Modernizing your processes with technology like scheduling software enhances efficiency and productivity by eliminating errors and improving employee satisfaction. When you take the burden of manual workforce scheduling off managers, they and their employees are empowered to better manage their time, on and off the clock. That's not only a win for managers and employees, but for agencies and citizens as well.

A word of caution: trusting your WFM needs to a provider who doesn't understand the specific nuances of the sector may lead you to a solution that's not a good fit. You need an efficient, cost-effective and industry-specific solution to effectively manage public safety employee scheduling and employee data. Your solution needs to function in a way that truly works for fire, police, EMS and emergency dispatch teams.

We know public safety agencies don't stop. Aladtec understands the specific challenges of this sector and have solutions to address them. Our solution is suitable for

everything from smaller volunteer services to large multi-location agencies.

It's critical for you to be able to view and update staff schedules any time of the day or night – regardless of your location. That's why we've built a solution that is accessible from any computer, smartphone or other mobile device with Internet access. With one click, you can send out shift updates and fill an opening quickly.

Is it time to level up your scheduling solutions?

Learn more about Aladtec's scheduling solutions for public safety.

➔ [Check it Out](#)

