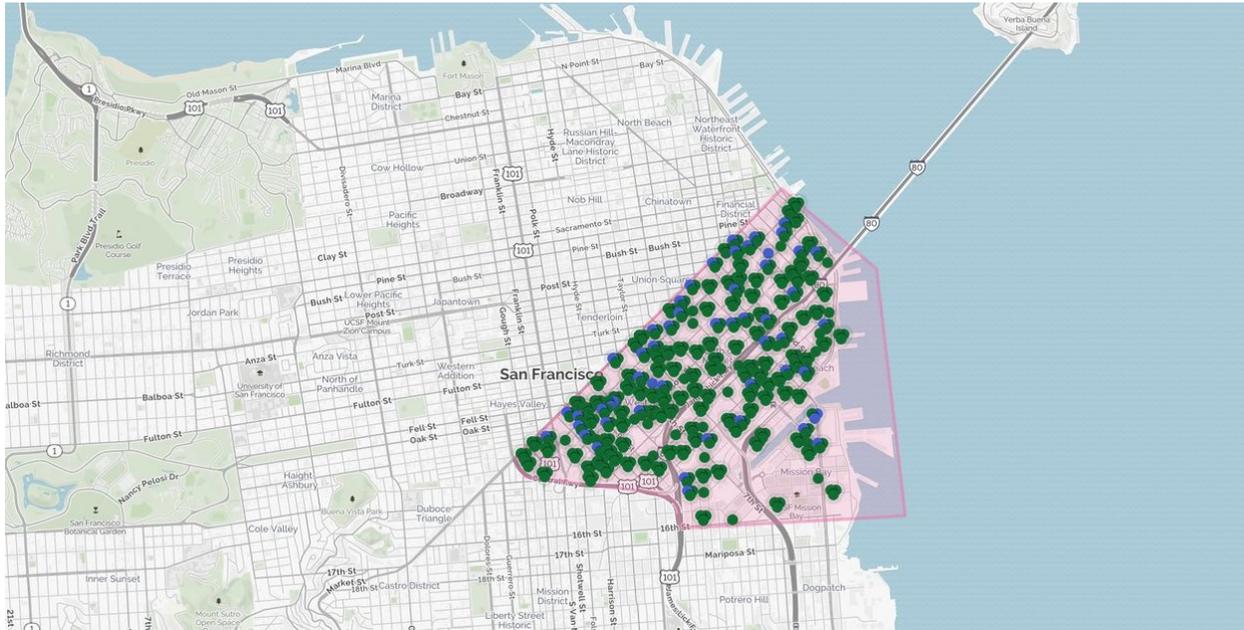# BuildingEye Launches Fire Department Inspection Map in San Francisco, Looks to Expand to Other Cities

Ben Miller | October 9, 2017

How often can a city inspector, standing in the lobby of a building they're inspecting, pull out their phone and check on that site's fire department data? Plumbing? Electrical?

If they can check on those things, it could be the difference between clearing that building's status within the hour or needing extra time — days, weeks, months, to tap into other departments' databases, send paper reports and wait for them to come back, and so on.

It's a problem that comes from the old standards of municipal information architecture, where each department has its own database, walled off from each other's, and with clunky user interfaces built when most computer screens were horizontal instead of vertical.

It's also a problem that can be solved with software that works with the old architecture.

That's the tack the startup BuildingEye has been taking for a few years now, working with cities to take their permit and inspections-type data and map it out, with enough tools to let government and citizen users alike quickly find data on a building.

Previously, the company worked largely with planning and building departments, electrical inspectors, plumbing inspectors and the like. Now, it's adding fire department data into the mix.

San Francisco is the first city to use BuildingEye's new [fire department product](). On an external website, the city has put up data where a person can look up — by address,

area of the city, time issued, type of report and more — building information going back to 1963. And it combines information from several departments in one place, which would have been more difficult to find before.

"It's pretty much the DNA of the city, when you look at fire, building [and] planning," said Ciaran Gilsenan, the company's chief executive officer. "Anything that's been built … they're putting on BuildingEye."

"It's pretty much the DNA of the city, when you look at fire, building [and] planning," said Ciaran Gilsenan, the company's chief executive officer. "Anything that's been built … they're putting on BuildingEye."

Jonathan Baxter, a spokesperson for the San Francisco Fire Department, declined to comment for this story, saying department leaders wanted to use the product for a year before judging it. But employees at the Department of Building Inspections, which has been using BuildingEye for about two years, said it's helped them in a number of ways.

"It really helps us to tell the customer over the phone, (if) somebody is complaining or wants to track a project near their house, 'You can track it on BuildingEye,' and that saves time for us and our clerks," said Chris Schroeder, a DBI building inspector.

Combined with a switch to paperless inspections and the use of tablets in the field, Schroeder said BuildingEye has helped him and other DBI workers complete their on-site tasks much more efficiently.

"Instead of waiting a month, month-and-a-half to resolve things, we can resolve things in the field and have that resolved overnight," he said.

A big part of that has to do with the ability to share information with other departments more quickly. In the past, he'd fill out job cards and send them to other departments to notify them about the status of a building inspection. Changes took time to reflect in the database; now another department can see updates much faster. There's less calling back to the office to ask questions before an inspector can do their job.

"If we're signing off [on] a building that we know needs sprinklers or a fire alarm installed in it, we can see for each address that there was a recently approved sprinkler or fire permit," said Patrick O'Riordan, DBI's chief building inspector.

If the system is structured right, Gilsenan said, the map will update automatically as city inspection staff do their work. So anybody — a potential building buyer, a developer, a neighbor, a city supervisor — can see up-to-date information about whether there have been any problems with a building, and whether those problems have been resolved.

The system also offers an analytics dashboard and report generation tools.

There are a few kinks in the system. According to Schroeder, the fire department uses a different system for numbering permits than DBI, and he'd like to see a system that could match those records to make it easier to cross-reference.

But that was the idea behind launching in San Francisco first, Gilsenan said: Set it up at one department, work out any issues they find, and then start selling it to other fire

departments. And although Gilsenan declined to give specifics, he said fire departments outside California are in pre-contract talks to start using BuildingEye after seeing it at work in San Francisco.

"When other fire departments want to put their data on BuildingEye, there's a structure already in place," he said.

http://www.govtech.com/biz/BuildingEye-Launches-Fire-Department-Inspection-Map-in-San-Francisco-Looks-to-Expand-to-Other-Cities.html