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Charles Perkins Centre Case Study

Any institution responsible for researching illness and disease needs a constant supply of chemicals and biological materials to carry out its work. And so it is with the Charles Perkins Centre (CPC), part of the University Of Sydney and charged with finding improved treatments for diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and related conditions. The CPC is occupied by more than 900 researchers and clinicians, plus a large number of visiting students.

Background
When it opened in January 2014 the CPC needed an effective and reliable system for monitoring and overseeing the ordering, storage and movement of chemical and biological assets which came into, and were distributed throughout, the building. Several hundred deliveries of hazardous materials come in to the CPC each year. Those assets go to researchers, clinicians and educators who are spread throughout six floors of the CPC’s main building.

Problem
Not only did the CPC need to know where items were, but also how long they had been there and their condition. Operating in an environment where there are strict regulatory and health and safety requirements around the storage of hazardous materials, the CPC needed something better than paper based record keeping for this purpose.

Solution
Responsibility for finding a solution rested with ISS Facility Services, a facility management company contracted by the University Of Sydney for ongoing management of all ‘soft FM’ services.

After exploring and researching various options, the ISS team decided on an RFID solution from Ramp RFID. A leading provider of RFID based asset tracking technology, Ramp RFID has a strong track record in the development of customised RFID solutions that deliver a high return on investment for its customers.

"From a day-to-day operational standpoint Ramp’s RFID system has truly delivered", said Paul.

"It’s reassuring that we have a tool which enables the CPC to meet its regulatory compliance obligations."
"Monitoring the locations and quantities of chemicals and biologicals within the CPC was not an easy process", said Paul Petoud, ISS's Dock Manager at the CPC. "This situation left the CPC potentially exposed to regulatory and safety risks, so the case for a new solution was quite compelling."

"The brief to Ramp was for an RFID based asset management solution, managed by ISS from the CPC's loading dock, which would enable us to know the locations and quantities of chemicals and biologicals within the CPC. What Ramp provided was a solution which allowed us to do just that."

The solution Ramp devised enables ISS staff to act as gatekeepers for all chemical and biological items coming into the CPC. When orders are raised for chemicals or biologicals, the ISS team creates records for them in the RAMP database. These records contain such information as the owner, the destination location, the product description, quantity, and hazardous details. Then, when these items are received at the CPC's loading dock, they are tagged with an adhesive RFID label and the barcode from this is scanned into the relevant record. Handheld readers are used for scanning the barcodes, monitoring the movement of inventory, and carrying out searches when required.

"The Ramp solution is working just as we had hoped and expected it would", said Paul. "All relevant material data is captured at the point of receipt, and from there it's a simple process for us to know where things are. Producing reports is straightforward and the task of monitoring asset movements using handheld readers is very simple."

Commenting on the solution his team developed for the CPC, Alastair McArthur, Engineering Director at Ramp RFID, said: "In order to meet the CPC's requirements, we made some modifications to Ramp's off the shelf asset tracking system, iQ Navigator, which we have deployed for many of our clients ranging from mining tools and equipment to museum pieces and artworks. We are very happy with the result we achieved for the Charles Perkins Centre."

Any research facility is bound by regulations which restrict the volume and nature of hazardous materials which can be stored within it. For the CPC the Ramp RFID solution provides a safeguard against potentially unlawful storage practices.

"When it comes to any hazardous materials we have to be very careful not to exceed our legally determined storage limits", said Paul. "It's not only to individual labs which this relates, but also to the building as a whole. By telling us what items are stored where, and in what quantities, the Ramp solution alerts us to when we are in danger of reaching those limits and enables us to prevent deliveries to locations which are already at their full regulatory capacity. CPC chose ISS as an FM provider because we could manage and reduce their risk. This project, from both a compliance and a safety perspective, is a real positive for the CPC."

The overall impact of the CPC's Ramp RFID solution has been greater transparency and increased control over its processes for purchasing, distributing and storing chemical and biological assets.