



Frequently Asked Questions

This note provides answers to some of the questions that potential users have about our system and about chemical inventory management in general.

Overview

What is 'Inventory' ?

Craic Inventory is a comprehensive chemical inventory management system consisting of a relational database, a sophisticated web interface and a suite of software that links the two. It is available in two forms. First, as a centralized system located in our office that users access via the Internet. Second, as a standalone system, including the computer hardware, that is installed at your site on your internal computer network.

What do we need to start using the system ?

To use the centralized server all you need is a computer with Internet access, a web browser and a bar code reader (for the person checking containers into and out of the system). For the standalone server, you also need to provide space, power, network access and system backups for the server.

What support do I need from our IT department ?

For the centralized server you need no support. There is no software to install and no maintenance to be performed. For the standalone server they will need to coordinate the installation of the server with Craic and will need to set up routine backups of the database to tape.

Can I use my own bar code labels ?

No (in almost all cases). We provide you with rolls of pre-numbered labels and we configure the software to recognize those numbers. Numbers outside that range will be rejected. In very special circumstances we can modify the system to use different labels. This might be necessary if you have already been tracking your inventory in a different system and wish to convert or if you have any special labeling requirements. These modifications involve additional cost.

How do we pay for the system ?

For the centralized server you purchase service for some number of containers and we provide that number of labels for you to use. When you need more labels you simply purchase service for an additional batch. In this way you essentially pay as you go, with no large upfront investment. For the standalone server you purchase the software and hardware as a turn-key package and then you purchase batches of labels at a lower unit cost.

Who can access the system ?

There are three levels of access to the system. You can give all your staff the password for the first level which allows them to search the current inventory as well as retrieve information about specific chemicals. The second level is reserved for those staff who will actually check containers into and out of the system, such as the staff in shipping and receiving. The third level is reserved for the person responsible for administering the system at your site.



Using the System

How do we check containers into and out of the system ?

Check in and check out are the critical steps in ensuring your inventory is accurate. As new containers arrive at your facility each one should be given a bar code label and be checked into the system before being passed to the laboratory. As containers are emptied in the lab they must not be thrown in the trash. Instead they should be sent back to the person responsible for inventory management and they should be checked out of the system before disposal. Setting up an efficient procedure for doing this and ensuring that your staff comply with it are the main challenges of inventory management.

How do I enter my existing inventory into the system ?

In order to build an accurate inventory you will need to label and enter the existing inventory in your facility. This will require you going through each lab and store room entering in the containers as you start to use the system. Your staff can take care of this or we can provide that service for you.

What is the difference between a Product and a Substance ?

The system makes an important distinction between Product and Substance. This is used to your advantage in minimizing the amount of data you need to enter for each container. A Substance is a specific chemical, such as "Sodium Chloride". A Product is a substance as sold by a specific vendor, such as "Sodium Chloride from Aldrich".

What if the substance does not have a CAS number ?

The system makes extensive use of CAS numbers to identify substances and to retrieve information. Many products do not have or do not include these numbers. They can simply be left blank and the system will make use of product names and catalog numbers to identify the substances.

How does the system handle solutions ?

Dilute solutions of hazardous chemicals can cause errors in your inventory reports if entered directly into the system. You should estimate the total amount of the principal hazardous component in the solution and enter that as the amount. This can result in some inaccuracy but is much better than including the full amount of the solution. For example, one liter of a 10% acrylamide solution could be entered as 100g of acrylamide (or even better as the true mass of the compound).

How does the system handle mixtures ?

The system does not currently handle mixtures. You should decide which chemical in the mixture represents the major hazard and enter the amount of this. This results in some inaccuracy but is a much better estimate than simply entering the entire amount.

How accurate do I have to be ?

You should strive for accuracy and completeness in your inventory but in practice issues like solutions, mixtures and incomplete compliance by your staff will all erode this to some degree. The main concerns in inventory management are the flammable, reactive and toxic chemicals. Ensuring an accurate inventory of these should be the priority.

What do I do if I make an error when I check in a container ?

The easiest solution is to check out the container, replace the label with a new one and check it into the system as a new container.

I have a lot of containers of the same chemical to check in. Do I need to enter each one individually ?

Yes, but the check in procedure is set up to minimize the work involved. You simply enter the full information about the first container and then follow the link that checks in another identical container. Each container does need to be given a bar code label and that label needs to be scanned. With this approach you can enter an entire case of containers very quickly.



Why does my inventory of this chemical keep rising ?

If you see that a specific chemical, such as ethanol, is continually being purchased and entered in to the system but that very few containers are being checked out then you probably have an issue with staff compliance. Most likely they are simply throwing the empty containers in the trash rather than sending them back to be checked out. This is addressed by reminding staff of the procedure and their need to comply with it. Less likely is the possibility that containers are being removed from the site. This can be an issue with ethanol and with chemicals that can be used for illegal drug manufacture. The sophisticated reporting features of Craic Inventory allow you identify these problems and take the necessary steps to correct them. In extreme cases of non-compliance by your staff you may need to perform an audit on each lab and update the inventory system as required.

Hazardous Material Reporting

What types of report are available ?

The system provides inventory reports at several levels of detail. Perhaps the most important is the overall Hazardous Material Inventory Statement (HMIS) which shows your situation relative to the limits defined in the Uniform Fire Code. This is the report you need to provide to your local fire department. You can view web pages detailing the total inventory for each hazard class and these include links that let you view that data in ever increasing detail down to the level of individual substances and the bar code numbers for each container.

How can I export the data in the reports to other applications ?

Most of the report web pages include a link that lets you export the data into Microsoft Excel. Once in that application you can rearrange the columns or annotate the data at will.

Our facility has several buildings, can your system handle that ?

Yes, one of the important concepts in hazardous materials management is the 'Control Area'. This is defined in the Uniform Fire Code and, basically, represents areas within a building that are separated by appropriate fire walls. You have the option to record which Control Area a given container is placed in and you can then generate reports specific for each area. Multiple buildings represent multiple control areas. Each building may contain one or more control area.

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