

FP2 - TIP 'O THE WEEK #141 EXCEL AND FIREPRO

I think we can all agree that FP2 has a LOT of reporting capability. Sometimes, though, you need to do a report for council, or generate some information that isn't available in the standard reporting set.

In that case, a great way to get information out of FP2 is the use the Data Export function from the Reports Menu. Data export allows you to pull a large amount of data out of FP2 and drop it into a customized CSV spreadsheet file.

I go into a lot more detail about how to use the Data Export tool in Tip of the Week #125 http://ingenioussoftware.com/tips/125Printing_Exporting_Data.pdf, so you should take a look at that one if you want to see the basic instructions for Data Exports.

What I'd like to talk about here is some of issues that you may encounter with a Data Export, and how to work around them.

The first thing to be aware of when doing a data export is that the export function creates a CSV (comma separated values) file. This type of file can usually be opened by Excel (which is what most people use for spreadsheet work), but it isn't actually an Excel file. When you double-click on it, Excel converts the document automatically. The trouble here is that Excel usually makes some assumptions when it's doing the automatic conversion, and those assumptions aren't always correct.

The most common issue is when data with a slash (/) or dash (-) has been entered in a field in FP2. If the number before the slash is 12 or less, and the number after it is 30 or less, Excel assumes it's a date, and formats it accordingly. This is why you can have a field which contains the information "10-20", appear in Excel after exporting as "Oct 20, 2009".

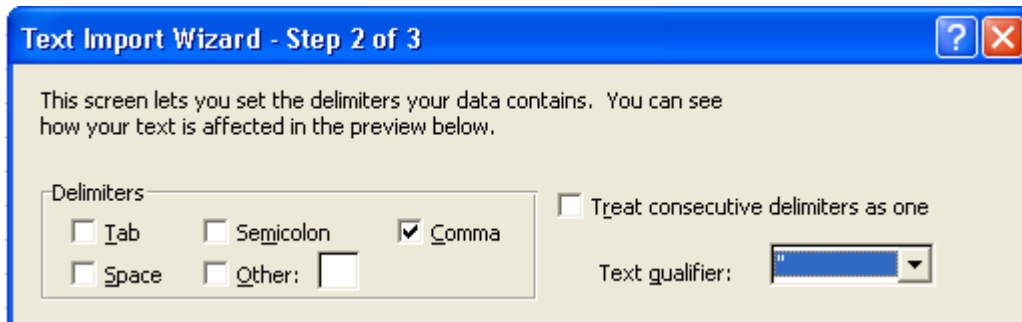
Data that contains commas, such as incident remarks, can also cause problems. In a CSV-converted document, each field is determined by the location of the commas, so text like "Dispatched Police, Fire, EMS", will show up something like this:

Dispatched		
Police	Fire	EMS

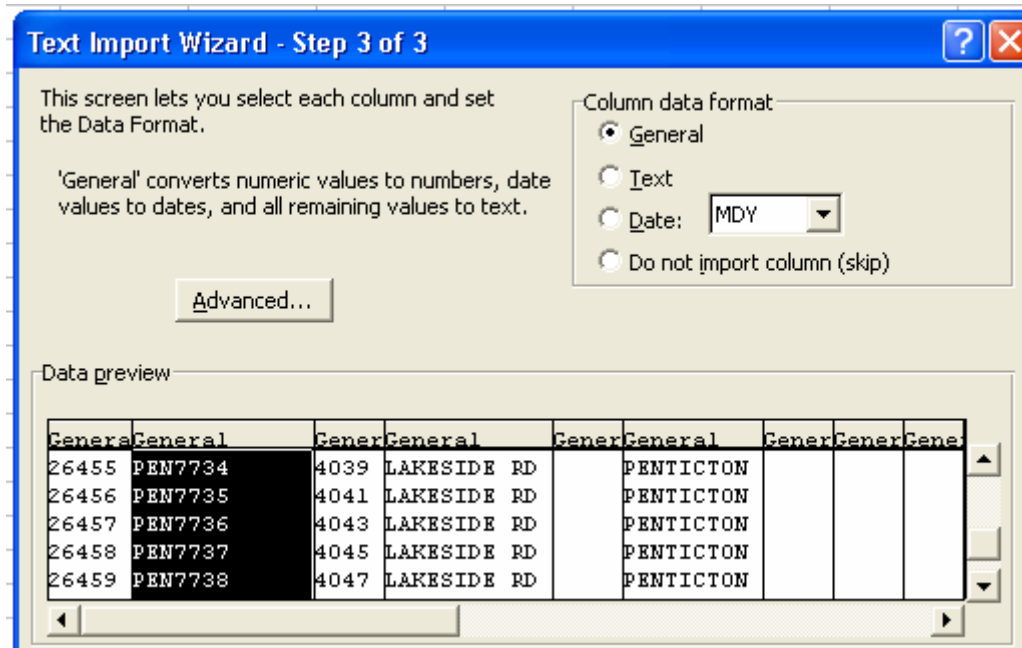
The best way to avoid problems like this is to use the Excel Data Import tool, rather than allowing Excel to auto-convert the data. You can do this by opening Excel and going to the Data→Import External Data→Import Data option.

In the Select Data Source window that appears, select the CSV file that was created by the FirePro export tool. In Step 1 of the Text Import Wizard, select the Delimited radio button.

In Step 2, select the Comma checkbox, and review the Text qualifier list. The Text Qualifier is put around text information in the CSV file to identify a section as "text", which means that the internal commas won't be put in different fields, like the second example above.



If you are having problems with exporting remarks fields, a good way to get it to work is to start and end your remarks fields in FirePro with quotation marks ("). Step 3 gives you a preview of how the imported data will look, and allow you to set the formatting options for each column. First, make sure that the columns and data are lining up correctly.



Each column also has a header that indicates the data format that will be used when the data is imported. The General tab will work for almost everything, but fields that have information that might be incorrectly converted to a date (like 10-20 in the first example above), should be set to "Text".

Excel will then import the data into a spreadsheet, which can be re-sorted, turned into graphs or used to generate additional statistics.

