



Your flexible friend

Lis Stedman talks to Monitor Pro about a new flexible software program, which can be customised to handle environmental data on a range of different areas

ENVIRONMENTAL management standards such as ISO 14001 and the advent of the European Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) Directive have produced a rising demand for software to manage environmental data.

Monitor-LT is a new software program intended to help companies keep control of the ever-increasing amounts of data which regulations require.

It is on the point of being beta tested – going out to existing customers for comment and review – but Phil Ely, the company's technical manager, says that because it is based on the existing Monitor Pro data management software, and therefore grounded in tried-and-tested principles and functionality, this stage should only last two to three weeks.

Monitor Pro started off three years ago as landfill software to organise and handle data generated from monitoring landfill sites. Traditionally, this sort of information is input into spreadsheets, but with the amounts of data that have to be generated to satisfy regulations, spreadsheets can become hard to handle.

"If you have 200 spreadsheets, it's just a nightmare," Ely comments. Monitor Pro has proved a successful alternative, allowing data to be input and manipulated to produce statistics, graphs or standard reports.

Branching out

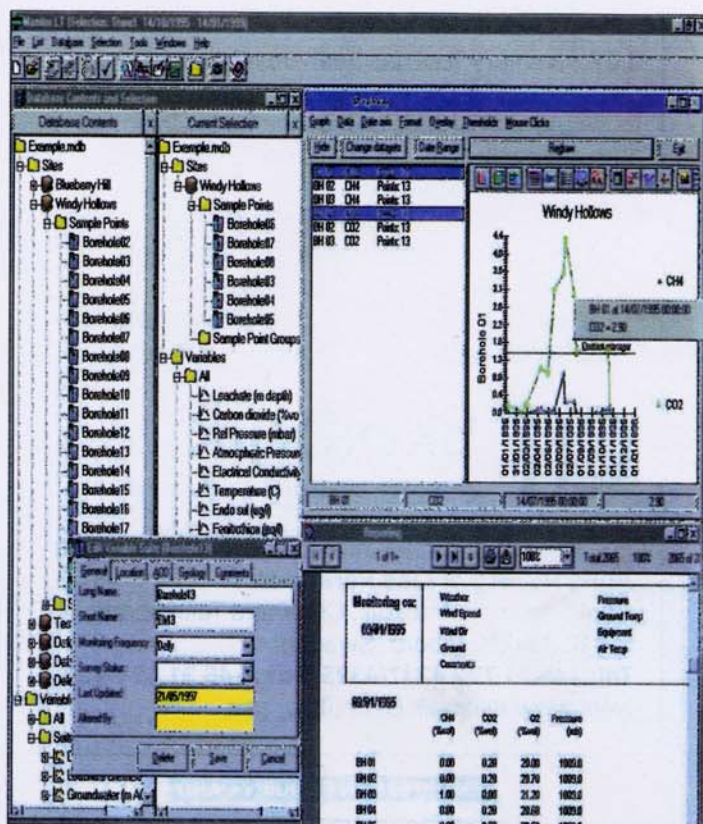
Monitor-LT takes the original concept a stage further, allowing the existing program's usefulness to be extended to other fields. "We have spent a lot of time making it more generic," says Ely. This meant tailoring the software so that its data parameters could be customised – users can choose which units to work in. This has allowed its scope to be extended to encompass the lucrative heavy industrial market, which also has an increasing need for coherent data collection.

The program keeps information in a standard form, Microsoft Access, which means that data can be imported and exported with ease into word processing packages and spreadsheets such as Microsoft Excel, when complicated calculations need to be made. The company is planning an upgrade to SQL server, an industrial-sized database. The software also has its own inbuilt reporting facility.

Transparency, coherence and easy access

What the program also allows is transparency in data handling and collection – something the Environment Agency is particularly keen on, as are ISO 14001 auditors. Having a program like Monitor-LT which allows requested data (for instance on breaches of consent) to be pulled together and presented coherently could be useful.

The program should look familiar to PC users: database navigation is through a Windows Explorer-style tree. It comes with a number of 'standard' databases with predefined variables, but Monitor-LT's main attraction is that variables



Monitor LT: virtually foolproof?

can also be infinitely customised, claims Ely. "Most similar products have preset variables, such as pH. But if you want to measure noise, pH has nothing to do with it. Being user-definable, Monitor-LT can even undertake quality measurement: if you want to measure the hardness of a widget, you can have a widget hardness parameter, and set up a widget hardness unit."

Virtually foolproof

Another useful function is the program's ability to check physical limits and thresholds. For instance, pH has a physical limit of 0 to 14, and if someone tries to input a figure outside this field, the software simply doesn't allow it to be entered. These limits are simply set as part of the information required when a new variable is being set up, and at this stage it is also possible to enter threshold limits. "Your consent limit might be between a pH of six and nine, and if you exceed that the program will tell you, so you find out immediately if you are breaking your consent."

The company envisages that Monitor-LT could find uses in oil refineries and large industrial concerns with a great many process variables which need constant monitoring. Local authorities, undertaking air quality monitoring under the new IPPC regulations, will also have a burgeoning monitoring programme which could usefully be handled by such software. ■

● Monitor Pro (01993) 706767

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