

Carol Singer Neuvelt discusses EHS MIS trends
EL Insights
March 24, 2011

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What are some of the trends you've seen in EHS MIS over the last couple of years?

Since we started our EHS Management Information Systems conference more than a decade ago, we've seen the evolution of a mature software marketplace. Within that, there are a large range of companies that provide many tools to address the foundations of EHS and sustainability management, e.g. compliance, hazardous waste and incident tracking.

The major shift in the software industry came a couple of years ago, when we moved from large scale systems that had to be customized for each firm (thereby requiring a long implementation cycle) to greater flexibility in software offerings as a result of the software-as-a-service model. This new way of operating has democratized the field, allowing more companies to rapidly deploy systems at an affordable price point.

And over time, as the role of the EHS function has grown, EHS leaders now come to the selection process with a longer and more specific list of system requirements that are driving the industry forward.

What do you see as the major trends just emerging or that will emerge in the next year or two?

On the user side, companies are increasingly looking for software to address emerging needs such as greenhouse gas tracking, product stewardship and global product material compliance. To this end, there is an increased interest in EHS systems that can interface with a firm's other operational software. One example of this is greenhouse gas management. What we know is that companies need software options to measure emissions, but it's not yet clear whether the best practice will be to purchase a specific module to address this need, or integrate it into their broader software systems.

Who typically is in charge of selecting, implementing and using EHS MIS - what job functions do they hold, and at what level within the company?

The EHS manager continues to be the primary decision-maker when it comes to evaluating and purchasing software for that function. What we heard at our March 2011 EHS MIS event were examples of EHS managers who created new working relationships with the IT department or in some cases even hired their own IT personnel to meet their specific needs.

What are the biggest challenges that EHS managers struggle with when buying and implementing MIS?

As with any major investment, EHS leaders must develop a return on investment model to justify the software purchase. In the case of EHS MIS, the challenge is to identify the business objectives, articulate the scope of the need, understand what the software can do and develop opportunities for user buy-in.