

Are SHEQ management systems really necessary?

Successful and profitable companies are constantly looking for ways to manage costs. But, as PAUL DE KOCK, managing director of Metrix Software Solutions, notes, it is foolhardy to cut costs when it comes to health and safety management systems. Instead, it makes sense – and cents – to invest in an electronic management system

Employers that invest in workplace health and safety management systems can expect to reduce fatalities, injuries and occupational illnesses. These result in cost savings in a variety of areas – such as lowering workers' compensation costs and medical expenses, avoiding OSHA penalties, and reducing costs to train replacement employees and conduct accident investigations.

In addition, employers often find that changes made to improve workplace health and safety can result in significant improvements to their organisation's productivity and financial performance.

PAPER OR ELECTRONIC MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS?

But which is better: paper or electronic?

A simple comparison reveals that an electronic management system is likely

to result in fewer injuries and occupational diseases than a paper based management system. The costs associated with a single lost time injury can be far higher than the costs

associated with the implementation of an electronic SHEQ Management system such as IsoMetrix.NET. ■

Manual or paper-based management systems	Electronic management systems
Document and records management is highly susceptible to corruption through poor version management and loss of data. Data can end up in the "wrong hands" as it is uncontrolled.	Documents and records are stored in secure databases on servers with back-up facilities. Documents and records have automatic version control. Data is managed through sophisticated security protocols.
Delays from manually passing documents from one person to another (manual workflow) mean that the workflow can be interrupted or terminated at any point and there is no way of knowing where and when this has happened, or of preventing this from happening.	Records are managed in real time – if there are delays in workflows, these are easily traced and addressed.
Poor communication of near-hits, incidents and risks to people that need the information means that they cannot be pro-active and put preventative measures in place, resulting in more injuries and occupational illnesses.	The relevant document or record is available to those who need it, where they need it, and when they need it – in real time.
No culture of continual improvement or accountability develops because it is difficult to measure performance.	Culture of continual improvement and accountability develops through improved transparency, visibility and performance management.
There is almost total reliance on an individual to make things happen – when the individual leaves so does most of the system.	Once the system is established it is much less reliant on any individual and is self-sustaining if implemented correctly.
Limited accountability of line management because they do not have the information necessary to make informed decisions.	Because all the relevant SHEQ information is available to management where and when they need it, management can be held directly accountable for safety and health.
It is extremely difficult and time consuming to make sure that corrective actions are put in place and tracked to completion.	Action-tracking makes it possible to ensure that an organisation reaps the benefits of initiatives such as risk assessment, audits and inspections.
Trends are not easily obtainable or reliable without considerable effort, which means that the organisation is unable to predict and manage based on real knowledge.	Because the records are available in real time within a structured secure database, it is possible to generate reports and management dashboards. This allows for the development of preventative and corrective action plans.
Safety and health specialists are so busy with administrative management that they are unable to apply their knowledge and experience to improving SHEQ performance within the organisation.	Safety and health specialists have the time to apply their knowledge and experience by looking at the trends/SHEQ performance and developing/implementing strategies to improve.

