



Determining the Right Permitting Software



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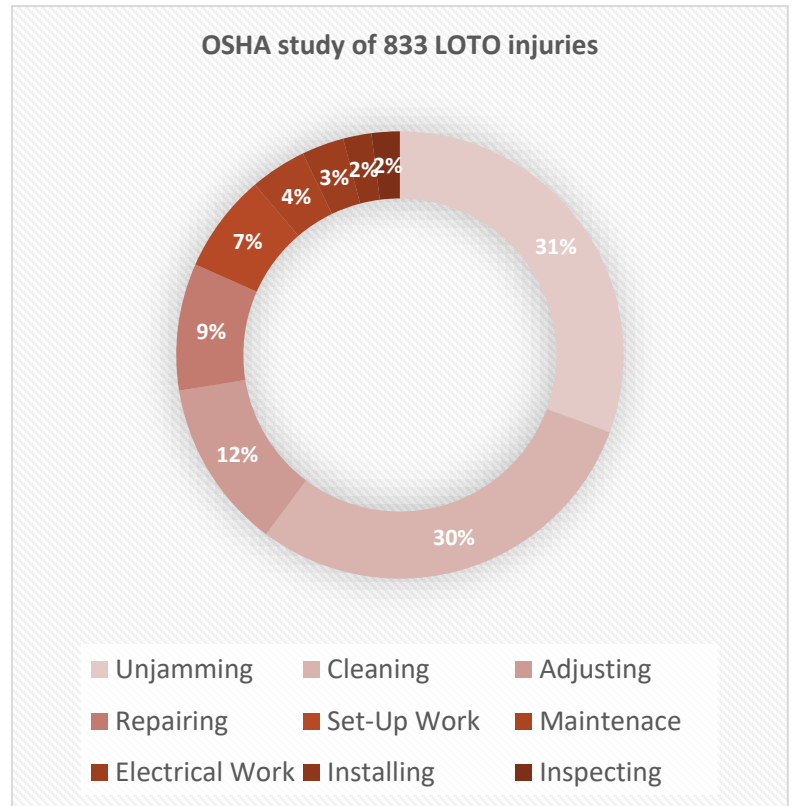
This may seem like a no-brainer, but many companies are still resistant to using safety software. Why? Because in some cases the application and approach are different than industry norms. Many business owners don't necessarily see the advantages of integrating software into their daily routines. In reality, it can save them hundreds of thousands of dollars and provide superior protection for workers.

If you are thinking about investing in software, it's important to consider a few key points that can help you choose the right solution for your business. You should not only review your current business requirements, but also keep in mind what your business will need in the future. Consider how software can help your business to adapt to the changes and grow.

Managers of companies who operate hazardous facilities are fully responsible for the health and safety of the employees who work there. A critical aspect of the plant safety is to determine and diminish the risks associated with non-routine work such as confined space entry, hot work, working from heights and so on. The "permit to work" is the accepted best practice for ensuring that the plant is safe with all energy sources isolated; that people are informed about the risks; that adequate precautions have been taken prior to the work taking place; and that work is taking place under the supervision of

persons who are properly trained, competent and authorized.

Unfortunately, many paper-based permit-to-work systems are simply unmanageable and lack the integrity required to ensure that work always takes place safely. The best designed paper-based systems are prone to challenges with traceability, legibility and so on. Furthermore, such systems are typically ineffective in assisting supervisors to identify adverse interactions between multiple work crews. The result of a poorly managed permit and isolation systems could be an accident leading to injury, loss of life, environmental damage, impairment to the reputation of the company, legal and other measures.



Electronic Permit to Work (ePTW) systems are a key factor in ensuring the safe execution of hazardous work activities at operational facilities. Permit to work procedures are typically supported by a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) process and a range of interrelated procedures for high risk activities such as confined space and hot work. While safety management has notably evolved over the last few years, especially with the introduction of electronic-based systems, the considerable majority of operational facilities world-wide still use manual paper-based permit to work procedures and forms.

After creating a list of all potential software solutions, the next step is to narrow it down to a manageable list of realistic options. Ultimately, that list should have three to seven products on it—any more than that and you risk drawing out the software selection process too long.

Ask Yourself:

- Does the solution satisfy your most important feature requirements?
- Does the solution support the number of users you will ultimately have using the tool?
- How user-friendly is the solution?
- How easy/complex is the implementation?
- Does the vendor have customers similar to you? How compelling are the vendor's testimonials/reviews?
- Are they grossly outside of your budget?
- Do they have too many features that you don't need?

Once you've answered these questions, you should find that most of the resolutions on your initial long list can be removed.

Making the Software Your Own

One of the more overlooked issues when selecting the software is the ability to “brand” the system with your organization's look-and-feel. While many ask whether the system can be configured to meet their changing needs, the ability to change the colors, logos, fonts and general layout of the navigators, forms and reports is usually an afterthought. Many systems will offer some level of configurability, but this will usually not extend to the layouts themselves. End users must contend with the vendor's look-and-feel, which will be foreign to them.

The ability to control all aspects of the software's user interface helps user acceptance of the software, and user buy-in is one of the major contributors to a software implementation's success. In the age of Web-based applications,

vendors can demonstrate flexibility by complying with Web user interface standards. Furthermore, they should be

able to provide this control without the need to customize the software. When selecting a system, have a well-defined set of user interface requirements that will make the system work for you, and ensure that the system is able to meet those requirements without having to do extensive development.

- **The Business Case:** User buy-in will skyrocket if the system uses familiar colors, layouts and concepts. There are systems in the market that provide 100% configurability of the user interface (the presentation layer), so that the system can be modified, without programming, to match the exact user interface standards implemented in other Web-based systems, such as the company's intranet, or even the company's external website. The ability to "brand" the system is a critical part of evaluating whether the new system will be good fit.

- **Technically Speaking:** When looking at how extensively the system's user interface can be configured, look to systems that provide direct access to the presentation layer using standard web page design tools. This usually means the ability to change the layout without affecting the software's functionality. Also, make sure that all aspects of the user interface are configurable, so a consistent look and feel can be implemented throughout.

Determining the right software option for your company is imperative. When selecting a safety permitting software, there are certain factors to consider.

Generally, Safety Directors and Managers look for a software solution that will integrate with the existing safety permitting process. These solutions will identify, extract, and import data or information that's available, all the while seeking to streamline and enhance the overall process. Beginning with the available information brings safety processes and documents to life, ensuring compliance with each and every stage of the safety document life-cycle. Intuitive tools and features guide personnel along the way to generating safe and compliant documentation for every job.

A software company that is flexible won't hold a company back or stifle growth. Safety managers must consider whether or not the software can adapt to varied permit types and expand as the business or need grows. Some software companies utilize the option of offering modules, where every permit possible can auto-populate inputted data across all of the required forms to complete a work package. A software solution should integrate and work in concert with globally recognized EAM systems such as SAP, Maximo, Ellipse to ensure a fully integrated safe system of work for the site.

As important as flexibility is, consider growth and development. As technology evolves, safety managers look for a partner that will meet the ever-changing needs of the business, such as allowing system tweaks to respond quickly to changes. A software company must keep its products up to date in keeping with Microsoft's updates otherwise the vendor program will not function. One of the last considerations is a company's tech support. Sometimes, IT issues need dealing with yesterday, and a responsive IT team is needed. Look for a service that gives you a guaranteed response time, and a single point of contact.

Partnering with Stilwell & Associates means that you will have access to the most current and up to date product on the market that will not let you down. Unlike other well-known software solutions, SafeTK® has the cross-functionality between modules that saves our clients a substantial amount of time.



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