

Transparency

And Trust

OpenSpace is a data-sharing project that aims to set a new standard for environmental compliance monitoring. CIWM interviewed Viridor's head of environmental management, **Chris Dussek**, and the Environment Agency's waste recovery team leader, **Pandora Rene**, to find out more...

Viridor's OpenSpace data portal project was launched last month in a partnership between the company and the Environment Agency. Viridor has stated that the project now has the potential to "revolutionise regulatory monitoring and environmental data returns required by environmental permits". OpenSpace is effectively an interactive web page that enables Agency officers to view Viridor's environmental compliance data live via a series of structured queries from any web-linked computer.

CIWM: Tell us the history of the project and how it has come about – why is OpenSpace needed at all?

Chris Dussek: In following technology developments since the first issue of permits, we have known for some time that reporting requirements for environmental permits could be improved upon. Previously, regulatory reporting for every waste and recycling facility operated under an environmental permit has been done via routine monthly, quarterly and annual reports. This transfer of data has been arduous, costly and retrospective for both parties. For example, Viridor has to submit over 50000 separate data items to be assessed by the Environment Agency in such reports.

Therefore, this project is a result of a four-year change management programme within Viridor to examine and improve every aspect of environmental data management. The intention is that OpenSpace



Pandora Rene and Chris Dussek introduce OpenSpace at RWM in partnership with CIWM

embraces latest data management practice – to enable timely review of the environmental performance of all of our facilities.

Pandora Rene: The Agency has also been keen to explore more effective and efficient ways of monitoring compliance at landfill and waste treatment sites. The current system of requiring retrospective reports containing all compliance data has not necessarily kept pace with what is possible regarding online data management. OpenSpace therefore also fits closely with our better regulation agenda.

CD: By placing all of our required data live onto the OpenSpace portal in a timely and consistent format, Viridor enables remote and rigorous auditing by Agency officers of the performance of any of our sites at any time.

CIWM: So what are the benefits over the current way of doing things?

CD: As we see it, the real benefits of OpenSpace are all about enabling both parties to focus on the real issues at any given site and the outcomes and improvements, rather than a paper-chase and bureaucracy. The portal shows that work has been scheduled and data collected correctly in line with environmental permit requirements, with the data presented in standardised user-friendly formats. This then presents details of Viridor actions relating to any permit trigger breaches and demonstrates the continual maintenance of operating systems.

PR: Overall it has to be about enabling the regulator and the operator to focus on core improvements and environmental protection. It allows core permit data to



The remote monitoring of leachate, one area that OpenSpace is designed to help with

be downloaded by Agency staff wherever they are and at any time. Enabling remote monitoring of Viridor performance from the Environment Agency's offices obviously has good potential to save time and money.

CIWM: The OpenSpace portal seems to require a good degree of trust between the regulator and the regulated – how can the Agency have the necessary level of confidence that the data provided is transparent, accurate and up to date?

PR: That's the first question asked by many of our officers. The principle behind the project is that there must be openness, trust and transparency between the Environment Agency and the regulated company. This is a whole new way of doing our work. The reliability and robustness of both the system and the data presented has been demonstrated and checked thoroughly. There are plenty of checks and balances in place to ensure confidence in this aspect and, as we move forward, the better way of working should also help build trust

between regulator and operator.

CD: Everything visible within OpenSpace is underpinned by multiple layers of quality assurance. This ensures that key data and associated management actions can be communicated in a timely and professional manner to the Environment Agency. For example any exceedance of any monitoring threshold level required by both our permits and, equally importantly, our own management standards is automatically flagged by the system. This recognises the need for wider ranging management standards beyond those set as emission limits in our permits. We then have to include the appropriate action being taken to address any such incidence.

We could only have achieved this project with the help of key partners who also wanted to promote and deliver innovation and best practice. Our suppliers and partners including EHS Data, Enitial and Severn Trent Services have all worked closely with us to find better ways of working with data to deliver the quality and consistency visible within OpenSpace.

CIWM: What's the current status of the project? Are all Viridor sites included?

PR: The Environment Agency has issued a Regulatory Position Statement enabling OpenSpace to go live, effectively to ensure that it will work on a large scale across the country. As of 1 November, the scheme covers all Viridor's operational permitted landfill sites across the South of England.

CD: As we understand it, the Environment Agency position statement defines the scheme as a trial while it assesses the implications of accessing data on demand rather than having retrospective reports submitted to them. Viridor is confident that this method of work will continue in relation to our sites. Sites in the north will be included from January 2012, with all other permitted recycling and treatment sites to follow through the first half of 2012.

CIWM: You've been quoted as saying that OpenSpace could "revolutionise regulatory monitoring". What do you mean by that and what are the next steps if it proves successful?

CD: The advantages of a system such as OpenSpace will become more apparent as we go forward and are able to quantify savings, efficiencies and benefits, including how the use of such systems will be positively reflected in future OPRA profiles. We think that as others see the benefits, other companies within our sector and other industries will adopt similar methodologies.

PR: From an Environment Agency perspective, we'd expect to see others in the sector wanting to reach the same point. To us this is demonstrating commitment to improvement and best practice. However, we do have to be convinced that any similar systems proposed are robust and reliable, with management systems and standards in place to back it up. Although this is a voluntary scheme and standard, we'd hope other regulated parties would look to achieve a similar standard in due course. **CIWM**