What's Important in Selecting Pipeline Inspection Software?

By Joe Purtell – Director of CUES Software Division

For many of us in the pipeline inspection business, just mentioning the word "software" causes anxiety. For decades we used paper forms and VHS tapes to log the condition of pipes. And life was pretty good unless, of course, it was you that had to go and look for a specific video tape and then search for a particular section of video within the tape to try and figure out the cause of a problem. Today our industry is undergoing an enormous change, and software is playing a major role in helping people make better decisions about their infrastructure. Choosing the right software is critical to succeed in today's water/wastewater management business.

Across the county there are approximately 54,000 community water systems and 16,000 wastewater systems. Chances are very high that your community is investigating how it will continue to serve its customers at, or better than, the current service levels despite having less federal funding, increased regulation, constant deterioration, and limited ability to increase its revenues. According to the EPA's Gap Analysis report, we're headed for an apocalypse where the economic, social and environmental policies we have today cannot be sustained. The health of our communities and our quality of life are at stake.

Forward-thinking utilities are gearing up to meet these challenges by examining each tactical step they must take to complete an overall infrastructure management strategy - one with long-term sustainability. Buried infrastructure is one of the most valuable physical assets in the US. Having access to capital is critical to maintaining it. Municipal Bond funding often provides the necessary dollars to complete rehabilitation projects. Recently more attention has been paid to the quality of the information that Utilities provide to bond underwriters to borrow money. Visibility into the valuation of the infrastructure affects the credit levels a utility or community can obtain. Additionally, Utilities with histories of regulatory compliance issues, such as EPA Consent Decrees, can see much higher borrowing rates. Like having bad credit, financial options become severely limited for a community with poorly maintained infrastructure and a downward spiral can happen.

In the past, government financial reporting did not include capital assets, but now under GASB 34 accounting standards, a municipality must report the value of all capital assets. This means that Inventories must be documented and Asset values must be calculated.
One of the first steps to achieve a sustainable plan is to develop an asset management program with a computerized inventory of all the structures beginning with manholes, pipe segments, valves, pumps etc. Having the ability to manage and track assets is the foundation for achieving long-term sustainability.

People manage assets by collecting data about the condition, location and physical attributes of the assets. To accomplish this task efficiently, field inspectors must be equipped with software that is *asset-based*. In other words, the software must be capable of tracking an individual structure with a unique ID, such as a specific manhole, rather than several structures connected together to form an inspection. A true asset-based design enables the software to import entire asset inventories that may already exist in other infrastructure asset management tools, such as Hansen, Azteca, GBA, MRO Maximo and geographical information systems (GIS) such as ESRI ArcView, which are also asset-based.

Here are some questions to ask a software vendor to understand if a particular inspection software package is asset-based:

- ***Can the software import an entire asset database into it?***

For example, could 80,000 manhole ID's be imported into the software so that all of these assets are at my fingertips to perform inspections upon?

- ***Can the software allow us to constantly synchronize and update the asset information with a master Oracle or SQL server database located downtown at City Hall?***
- ***Can I import and retain the entire list of assets despite not ever having generated an inspection on the assets?***
- ***Can I see all the inspection history, including videos and pictures, performed against a particular asset?***

If the software can answer "yes" to these questions, then it can serve as a foundation to build upon. Municipalities will get better intelligence about their infrastructure when condition assessment can be performed at the asset level. Better Capital Planning decisions are possible when the probability of failure can be predicted due to the direct correlation of an asset's expected life cycle and it's current level of deterioration. And from this information, risk assessment can be performed to understand the consequence of failure. Good, asset-based software is the linchpin for this to happen and therefore a powerful tool to achieve sustainable water services. ■

Developed by CUES, Granite XP is a comprehensive software solution for the Water/Wastewater industry that's used to organize and assess the condition of buried Wastewater and Stormwater assets. For more information or a demonstration of Granite XP via the Internet, contact Joe Purtell at 800-327-7791, x-444, or email gxpinfo@cuesinc.com. Additional information is also available at www.cuesinc.com.

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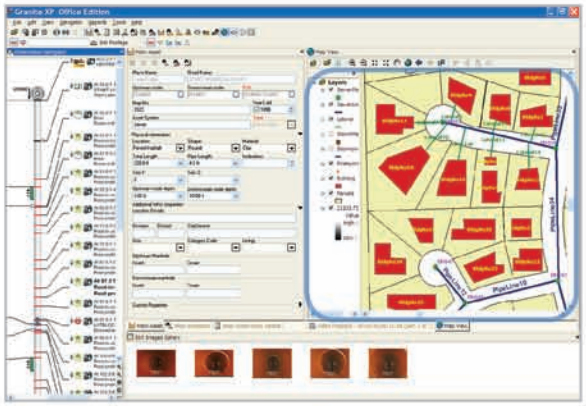

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