

e-Government – Environmental Permits via Internet

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Starting from a local government-internal Environmental Management System (UmSys), based on ORACLE and ACCESS-databases, the City of Cologne developed an Information- and Communication-system for business-partners and citizens, using the Internet, to speed up environmental permits without losing quality and regarding environmental standards. The System is connecting different public authorities on the regional and provincial level. (Provincial Environmental protection agency /Staatliches Umweltamt Köln, Regional Subdivision of Ministry for Environmental Protection North-Rhine-Westphalia /Bezirksregierung Köln). The project development is supported by the European Commission.

In Europe, permission to build, or alter industrial plants which affect the environment is given under the conditions of the IPPC Guideline (Guideline for the Integrative Avoidance of Environmental Pollution) of the EU; the corresponding act in Germany is the BImSchG (Bundes-Immissionsschutzgesetz =Federal Environmental Impact Protection Act). Regional companies and consultants can process their permitting acts using online-tools. The web-portal is an interactive system for the support of Environmental impact assessment and –permission. A system is developed, that integrates heterogeneous environmental data with geographical, alpha-numerical and workflow-data on different platforms. The server based workflow has to provide support for each requirement of the users, applicants, consultants and the staff of the involved environmental agencies. An authentication tool has to identify them and to regulate the data access and electronic signature.

All participants have access to the workflow, according to their specific user rights, the permission to follow the process via internet by a component "Permitting Assistant". They can indicate evaluation features through a GIS as well as communicate with the co-ordinator in the permitting authority. During the steps towards approval, the actual status of the process, including all relevant documents, is public to all participants, thus optimising communication at every level of completion.

The architecture of the tool is a classical three tier layer. The Java-applet concept gives the most independence for users and the best adaptability for specific IT-environments. The workflow process is set up in Permitting Back-end including all additional and evaluation features. An XML-middle ware is establishing the server-client-communication. The front-end program is independent from the back-end, because many authorities might have different existing back-ends. The IPPC-

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Procedure is not a strict formalised procedure, that can be handled with simple forms; it is on the contrary an open process with numerous documents and sub-tasks. The tools support this structure with a high amount of flexibility. The program-structure and tools can be adapted and used for other workflow-management, with a couple of participants and interlocked working-steps, easily.