

IMSMA Handheld Tools: The Future

Jean-Paul Rychener

The handheld EOD-IS SURVEY tool is intended to enable the safe and reliable collection of data during a Technical Survey. The tool allows surveyors to take coordinates of dangerous or suspected dangerous areas without endangering themselves. Moreover, the tool allows for the direct export of collected data into the IMSMA system. The latter is a simple task that all but eliminates the possibility of data-entry errors. An important quality of the tool is that it is user-friendly and requires very little IT knowledge.

Having said this, before we can be certain of the field applicability of the handheld tool, it is important to assess its appropriateness in the field. The testing process has earlier been discussed by a member of the University of Kansas evaluation team. Therefore, I will only briefly touch on some of the field challenges we encountered and briefly present our plans for the future.

The first field test took place in Chile, and the preliminary results of this and later tests have been discussed by the evaluation team. However, it is worth noting that the 15-day training and testing period, which I witnessed, seemed to demonstrate that the tool was able to handle the climatic and geographic conditions that were encountered during those tests. Moreover, the user teams seemed to be generally pleased with the product. All was not perfect, however, as there were technical troubles with some of the equipment – in particular the binoculars, which seemed to require an incredible amount of precision on the part of the user in long-distance point identification. In such cases, it appeared more useful to attempt to use the GPS alone and to manually find the perimeter by travelling around the suspected area.

A second test was started in Albania, where further issues came to the surface. For example, it was found that mobile phones that were left switched on caused interference with the other equipment. In addition, it was found that the GPS unit and the binoculars had to be kept at least 50cm from each other in order to prevent interference between them. Challenges in getting a reliable connection between the satellite and the GPS were also encountered in Albania.

That said, identification of the above issues provides useful knowledge that allows us to work on finding suitable responses to the challenges they represent.

At the moment, plans for future tests include Western Sahara and a second, yet to be identified, location. The tests will continue until the end of the year, and perhaps carry on into 2005. The continuation of testing allows for the identification of further challenges, together with efforts to respond to them in an efficient and effective manner. At this stage, we cannot guarantee that results will be positive in every sense, but all efforts are being made to meet the challenges we encounter in different conditions and locations.

Depending on the results from all of the test sites, efforts will be made to address any shortcomings identified in the tool. It is important to clarify that at this point in time there will be no deployment of the tool in locations not directly involved in its testing.

If the tool does meet the demands of the field, we would like to extend its functionality so that it is not simply limited to Technical Survey, but can be used to gather data for a variety of purposes within the mine action arena.