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## Severn Trent Water - Permits: A Utility Perspective

### Severn Trent Water – Permits: a utility perspective

Since 2004 when Royal Assent was given for the Traffic Management Act (TMA), affected companies have invested heavily in upgrading their IT systems and implementing new business processes, in order to comply with the new regulations.

Severn Trent Water, the world's fourth largest privately owned water utility, is no exception. With more than 8 million water customers and a geographical region encompassing 36 local authorities it was imperative that the utility was not only able to meet its legal obligations from 1st April 2008 but was also prepared for future legislative requirements - such as TMA permits which come into force 1st October 2008.

In the West Midlands region, where Severn Trent Water has its headquarters, two consortiums are already investigating the potential of operating a permit scheme. Under the new regime Severn Trent Water estimates it will face an increase in costs of between £20-30 million per annum in permit fees.

Anita Solanki, TMA Operations and Compliance Manager for Severn Trent Water, highlights the challenges faced in meeting the 1st April timescale whilst maintaining a 'business as usual' policy at Severn Trent Water with little or no disruption to the service provided.

"Since April we've been demonstrating how we're able to work collaboratively with Local Authorities switching from ETON 3 to ETON 4 as well as working with other Utilities," she said. "In an initiative set up by National Grid and trialled with Staffordshire Council, our representative meet quarterly with other major utilities to share details of any major works we need to undertake in the region and we then coordinate our works accordingly."

Anita is Co-Chair of the West Midlands HAUC (Highways and Utilities Committee) and a member of the Department for Transport (DfT) working party for TMA. She's therefore well placed to represent the views of utilities when it comes to permit-related issues.

"Moving into permitting now so swiftly after the new regulations came into force we feel is premature. We believe all works promoters need more time to be able to adapt their working practices sufficiently to align with the new regulations.

### Anita Solanki, TMA Operations and Compliance Manager for Severn Trent Water

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“My general view is we would all benefit from taking some time to see the effects of new regulations and advances in noticing work to confirm they do reduce traffic congestion and improve road management. This would give the new regulations and standards a real chance to work before permitting is introduced.

“There are still a lot of unanswered questions needed to be addressed. Many works promoters are still trying to understand why they have web transmission errors, as well as interpretation matters relating to the new Code of Practice.

“The premature introduction of permits will make work more expensive for utilities with the potential we’ll have to add cost to customer’s utility bills. Without adequate experience and time to ascertain the effectiveness of the new regulations, such an additional burden may be difficult to justify and explain to customers already facing higher utility costs.” adds Anita.

Severn Trent Water went live with the new noticing requirements and IT software on 1st April and is now using EToN4 specialist Street Works software from the UK’s largest supplier of such systems, Exor Corporation.

Kimball Ormond, Utility Business Development Manager for Exor Corporation stated, “The DfT imposed timescales that meant in-house development of software was not economically viable, so they chose to outsource their street works noticing system to a specialist IT solution supplier. This ensured they were live for the April 1st deadline and now Exor Corporation takes responsibility to future proof their clients for ongoing legislation landmarks under the Act, such as Permits due on October 1st 2008.”

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