

Petrol PLAZA

An intelligent future for Fairbanks. erpecnews special feature, by Nick Needs



Last August, Shell awarded a three year global wetstock contract to UK based company Fairbanks, in partnership with systems and dispenser manufacturer Tokheim, to deliver its services to more than 3 000 petrol stations, in 25 countries, across three continents. At the time Shell's Wetstock Manager for North West Europe, Peter Houlton said, "Shell identified a number of sites which would benefit from remote wet stock monitoring during a recent risk assessment. Fairbanks emerged as our provider of choice after a comprehensive tender process and comparative trial of service providers. Fairbanks offer Statistical Inventory Reconciliation Analysis (SIRA) and Real Time monitoring to a high standard. Fairbanks' wetstock management service will be critical to help manage our global petrol retail network using various data capture solutions and valuable reporting methods and we are looking forward to working with them over the coming years. Baudouin de la Tour, Tokheim CEO, said, "We are very pleased with the success of the Fairbanks-Tokheim partnership in the worldwide Shell tender for wet stock monitoring". We aim to provide a range of products and services that provide genuine return on investment to our customers

around the world. In 2010 Fairbanks joined forces with Tokheim, a global service stations solution provider, to help expand the business internationally.

It must be said that this achievement is a significant milestone in the company's history and reward for the hard work carried out by Directors Bob Conlin and Steve Jones over the last 20 years. The hair on Steve's head has definitely turned much whiter in that time, whilst on Bob's there just seems to be far less of it, but Bob also seems to have become far more relaxed, or is it more accomplished in his manner and appearance during the time I have known him, a good attribute in any Managing Director. In any event, I felt, it was definitely the right time to get Mr Conlin to talk some more about Fairbanks and ask him to identify the challenges and opportunities he feels retailers will be facing over the coming years. From my perspective there are a number of company profiles which I tend to lump together and believe that the suppliers in question all roughly do the same thing. Leak detection, tank monitoring, leak prevention, fuel monitoring, tank gauging etc., but the more I probe (forgive the pun) into this whole subject, every company involved in this line of business does seem to have its own unique concept point. Fairbanks is no exception and over the next two pages you will hopefully see why. I took Bob through a simple questions and answer session to which he was happy to supply answers in typical Bob style i. e. well thought out and no stone unturned!

I first asked him to explain the marketing objectives of Fairbanks and detail the benefits retailers can achieve by adopting their specific company offering. He replied "Fuel profit margins are being squeezed each year and the value of fuel losses is increasing. We show retailers how their business can save money on maintenance, reduced fuel losses and lower their risk, all at the same time through remote wetstock management, powered by 'real-time data'. Improving retail petroleum business through better fuel control, is our primary marketing objective. When talking to retailers we offer to share with them a vision of their business in the future, powered by an intelligent fuel control system, giving them visibility of their product from fuel terminal to customer vehicle".

To best explain all this in a straight forward and concise manner i. e. simple, I asked Bob if he could present to me, imagining I was a retailer interested in utilising the services Fairbanks has to offer. Bob was extremely pleased to conduct this undertaking and promptly moved up another three gears.

He continued. "Imagine for a moment that all of the information collected by the equipment on your site was available to you with the click of a button, collating all the data across all of the sites in your network instantly. How powerful a tool would that be? Many retailers have invested heavily into installing expensive onsite equipment such as Automatic Tank Gauges (ATG) and high-end dispensers. This type of equipment is a valuable asset to the effective running of a petrol forecourt. But in many cases retailers are failing to take full advantage of the tools, information and visibility of stock that this type of equipment makes available to them." The answer he said is a real-time wetstock management solution which collects and collates this data making it available to retailers in

real-time. "Having a real-time wetstock solution in place is the missing link between your site equipment and you. The data is gathered and made available in the form of intelligent management reports that can be generated online from a mobile phone or laptop, eliminating the unnecessary data tracking that usually requires visits or phone calls to numerous sites, reducing workload for area or network managers. This intelligent data reporting uses not only the fuel information but sales records also. This means that fuel purchasing decisions can be made intelligently as anticipated sales and stock holdings across sites can be viewed instantly."

Controlling fuel investment

Across a network of sites many thousands of euros worth of fuel can be delivered in just one week, and Fairbanks state that by increasing stock visibility retailers can account for every litre that is delivered, thereby protecting their investment. Bob added "Losses don't just happen on the forecourt, delivery based losses are an increasingly common headache for retailers. When an order of 10 000 litres of product is made, this is the amount that one would expect to be dropped into the tank, but that is very rarely the case. Fuel can often travel many kilometres before it is delivered to a service station and as a result of this, transit can be heavily impacted by temperature changes. Add to that the issues with short deliveries, tanker thefts and tanker leaks and all of sudden a delivery provides retailers with a number of areas of concern. Unfortunately it is impossible to be present at every single delivery across even a small network of sites, so how can retailers be sure of what they are getting delivered? An intelligent wetstock management solution would be able to identify exactly how much fuel was dropped into the tank even if sales are taking place at the same time. This means that retailers can be made aware of any discrepancies between the fuel that they ordered and the fuel actually received into the tank by making the data available online to be viewed from home or the office".

Limiting losses

An investigation to identify the source of losses on a forecourt traditionally involves extensive line and tank testing, dispenser isolation and costly maintenance call-outs, but Fairbanks confidently point to the fact that a real-time fuel management solution will identify the source of a loss in a matter of days rather than weeks. Bob explains "Data collected by a real-time wetstock management system will relay all of this information back to a data analyst. At this point the data can be examined and losses will be identified. Concurrently the data is submitted to an accredited statistical testing regimen run by the system, giving retailers the security of a software solution and the reassurance of human involvement and communication. By monitoring fuel movement across the site the data analyst can quickly pin point the source of the losses and then work with the retailer to achieve a positive solution. This full visibility of fuel movement on site will even identify losses that would otherwise be disguised by equipment such as Automatic Temperature Compensating (ATC) dispensers and vapour recovery systems that would impact on the amount of fuel in the tank. The above image shows the amount of losses experienced by some of our customers from when they implemented the real-time solution that we offer until today."

I asked what would happen in the unlikely case that somebody stole all the fuel from a tank, when for example the site is closed. Not ducking the question at all Bob answered “Effective wetstock management can protect fuel in instances where fuel is lost very quickly, such as a theft directly from the tank as you suggest. By having a predetermined loss threshold set for when forecourts are closed retailers can be alerted to a theft as it is happening. This detection system is in place to identify theft at any time. We actually have a recent case which demonstrates my point precisely.

On Christmas day, at 1:17am, just for the record, the ibank (Fairbanks’ data collection and analysis module) installed on site detected a sudden loss of more than 200 litres on Tank 5 diesel, which triggered the Night Time Loss alert. Within 15 minutes the alert was sent to the Fairbanks offices and automatically forwarded onto the security company covering the customer’s network of service stations. This meant that the customer could react to the situation even though the incident occurred on a national bank holiday. Without having a wetstock management system in place the thieves would have long since fled the site before the loss was discovered”.

Theft Case Study

The other important area of loss prevention Bob was keen to identify was in relation to leaks. In his summary of what was an excellent presentation he said “Notwithstanding potential damage to the environment, the costs of cleaning up a leak can run into the many thousands of euros putting most businesses into serious financial difficulty or even out of business altogether. A real-time wetstock system will give you the time and direction necessary to take action and recover the situation, 24 hours a day 365 days a year. So no matter when a leak starts you’ll be given the tools to deal with it in a timely manner”. Bob will be representing Fairbanks at the upcoming erpec 13 event in Nice from the 16th to the 18th of April, 2013 and said he would be more than happy to offer help and advice to any retailers who have serious concerns about this whole subject or perhaps those who just need a little reassurance.



More details at www.fairbanks.co.uk

[FOLLOW THIS LINK] to read the January/February issue of **erpecnews**.

Contact information



Fairbanks Environmental Ltd
The Technology Management
Centre, Moss Lane View
Skelmersdale, Lancashire, WN8
9TN
United Kingdom

 +44 1695 51775
 +44 1695 728898
 www.fairbanks.co.uk