

# COLLECTING DATA ON CONTRACTOR PERFORMANCE<sup>1</sup>

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Distribution line clearance is a major component of most utilities' operating budget. Utility Foresters are constantly confronted with the need to justify budget requests, schedule work effectively, account for work completed, verify expenses, and improve worker productivity. Thus it is essential that the Utility Forester has line clearance production and cost data readily available. Computerized record keeping of cost and production data is the most effective method of obtaining a continuous stream of information for your management decisions.

*Selection of a system.* Before you make any decisions on a new system, you and your staff must analyze the existing system of record keeping from producer to user. The best source of how things currently work is the people actually doing the work. They can tell you what is right or wrong. Decide what your information needs really are. Do you need all the bells and whistles? Can you afford them? Find your information users and address their needs.

Take a look at current and future needs. Develop a flow chart (Your systems people will help you with this.) to track how you want your new system to work from start to finish. Prepare detailed descriptions of your requirements such as:

- Time sheets
- Reports: on line or printout?
- Who puts in data?
- Who should receive data?
- Development and training needs
- Interaction with other information systems in your company (VERY IMPORTANT).

Developing a new information system or updating a present system is a major task that may take three to four years to design and implement. In-house development is one approach if a firm commitment of time and support can be agreed upon. You will always have someone in-house to

service and enhance your system.

Obtaining a system at use in another utility or acquiring an existing system from a contractor or consultant can offer a tested and operating system in a relatively short time (several months). Cost and compatibility with your computer, accounting systems and procedures, and your information systems people are essential considerations.

There is always the possibility that all you need are a few adjustments to your old system, or even that your present system is just fine.

**The Illuminating Company system.** In 1982, we decided that our present computerized cost and production record keeping system was inadequate for the following reasons:

- Our contractors were recording their information on two reporting forms, one for us and one for their people.
  - All our data were being keypunched into the system at one central location.
  - Invoice verification
    - Invoice payment and accounts were settled all at different locations.
  - There were no provisions for on-line data viewing. Reports were available only as printouts and only on a monthly basis.
  - Data correction was virtually impossible.
- We determined that we absolutely needed the following:
- One-time reporting form that could be used by each of our contractors and our data processing people
  - Capability of entering and verifying our data at each contractor reporting location (regional service centers) with an on-line system
  - Printed reports generated on request for designated recipients
  - On-line viewing of data for designated people
  - The ability to access data for off-line analysis (i.e., personal computers) as our needs changed

1. Presented at the annual conference of the International Society of Arboriculture in Toronto, Ontario in August 1990.

- A system that would allow for future growth and modification
- A system that worked in conjunction with other record keeping systems in the company

We chose to use our in-house information systems people because of their willingness to provide their services and the desire of the company to use our own resources as much as possible. In the fall of 1985, our new system was tested, on-line, and functioning properly.

**Conclusion.** I believe our efforts were successful because we achieved all of our goals at an acceptable cost in a realistic amount of time. The

most important results have been that our line clearance staff now has *accurate* data on cost and production when and where they need it. Since much has happened in the information industry in the past five years, we are again looking at our system to further increase the effectiveness and ease of use of our system.

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## ABSTRACT

STERNBERG, G. 1990. **Sturdy as an oak.** Am. Nurseryman 172(2): 33-45.

Drought resistant, heat tolerant, cold hardy strong wooded and long lived with wildlife value and aesthetic appeal, the ancient and adaptable oaks can persevere. They are a genetically diverse lot, including broadly adapted generalists, as well as specialists tailored to the severest ecological extremes. If the genus *Quercus* is blessed with such adaptability and genetic richness, imagine the possibilities of combining the best qualities of different species through hybridization. Nature had the same idea; hybrid oaks are much more common than you might expect. Since oaks are so fond of hybridizing, why haven't the various species been overwhelmed by their hybrid offspring? The reasons are many, complex and not fully understood. Here are some of the most common: 1) though oaks are frequent cross-pollinators, they nonetheless might be most receptive to pollen of their own kind, 2) some hybrid crosses that succeed in the wild may be sterile and unable to reproduce, 3) hybrids readily backcross to their parent species, and 4) the parent species have adapted over millenia to their respective ecological niches and can out-compete most intermediate hybrids.