Touchpc helps keep maintain a high priority at the playground

Business

In the mid-1990s an EU Law was passed ruling that local authorities should be held responsible for any injuries happening in public spaces, and that the burden would be on them to prove that the injury was not due to neglect or poor maintenance of authority-owned items in the public sphere. An obvious example of a place where injuries were likely to happen was that of children’s play areas, where climbing frames, see-saws, roundabouts and such like would need to be kept within strict legal limits of maintenance.

The authorities were quick to implement testing procedures and employed inspectors to visit each apparatus in each play area and report on the condition of it, as well as factors such as the ground layer and the condition of the play area. Any failing components would thus be identified and new parts could be ordered from one of four possible suppliers. This would be done using forms, which would need to be filled out and returned to the back office for processing: filing and entering data entry, both time-consuming activities. It was also suspected that certain inspectors were not actually checking their full quotas of apparatus, choosing instead simply to give everything a pass to save them having to leave their vehicles. It all started to get out of hand, and a means of reducing paperwork, eliminating false readings and increasing work throughput was sought. The solution chosen, first used in Hoogeeven in The Netherlands, was ingenious.

Every piece of apparatus had a transponder (a kind of radiotag) buried within its fabric. This would emit a unique signal which could not be decoded by the inspector, and would only be detectable at close range. The inspectors were issued with TouchPC Eagles equipped with integrated or plug-in tag readers. Once the reader detected a signal, the file for that particular piece of

apparatus would launch. The inspector could then proceed through the check, using the simple menu-based system, common among TouchPC units, and end up with a picture of the overall state of every piece of equipment on their round. The day’s data could then be sent to the back office’s system, and any failing apparatus would trigger an alert to the purchasing department and a new component or an engineer could be ordered.

Paperwork became redundant overnight, as every piece of data, from the apparatus’s history to its present needs and its next inspection date, would automatically be entered into every item’s database location. The system is so secure that inspection records are legally acceptable in court. The unmitigated success enjoyed – a doubling of the amount of equipment that could be inspected, the reduction in administrative duties and the enthusiasm the inspectors had for their state-of-the-art TouchPC equipment – raised eyebrows in the capital and before long Amsterdam and Rotterdam were looking into the system. In fact, Rotterdam had even grander plans. A litigation industry was growing due to major problems with damaged branches of urban trees, and by radiotagging every tree the authorities could keep a check on the state of all of them.

Legal action is down and the whole operation is running smoothly, neither of which could have been achieved without the TouchPC’s portability and connectivity.