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EDMS – What is it; What is it not? [Dythee Lee](#)

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Here at Walden we use EQuIS as our environmental database management system (EDMS). EQuIS is an EDMS created by Earthsoft, Inc. I know what you are thinking. “Yeah, that’s great, but what is an environmental database management system?”

To answer that question, let’s first pretend it is 1990 and you are going on a business trip. You will be gone for a week and meeting clients daily. Besides the clothes you’ll need, think about all of the things you would have needed to pack in 1990 to be prepared and entertained during your week away. A paper airline ticket. Books and magazines to read on the plane and in your hotel room at night. An address book with all of the names and phone numbers you may need to call while away. An organizer with a calendar listing the days and times of your client meetings. A long distance calling card for calling the home office from the hotel and from pay phones while out on the road. Paper maps to get around. A typed itinerary of the places and people you are scheduled to meet. Paper and pens for taking notes. A calculator for making quick calculations while meeting with clients. Folders or binders stuffed with paper project notes and information. Maybe a Zagats restaurant guide so you can make informed decisions on where to eat in the strange city and have a way to call the restaurant and get directions to their location. A Sony Walkman to listen to the latest CD released by Pearl Jam. Finally, maybe you were fortunate enough to have a Nintendo Gameboy to play the latest video game should the book or magazine get boring.

Now let’s return to the present. If you have an iPhone or Android device take it out and look at it. There is nothing from our 1990 list above that cannot be stored or performed on that device in your hand. In fact, you also can take photos, videos, look at the street level view of the restaurant you chose, and perform a whole host of functions not even conceived in 1990. You just went from an extra large suitcase plus one heavy carry-on to something that fits in your pocket.

An EDMS does for environmental data what the iPhone did for business trips.

Endless cabinets filled with project folders, analytical data, well logs, location maps, water level charts, and all of the other project related data just got shrunk down to one small database stored on some computer server that may or may not be located in the same state where you find yourself sitting.

But like the iPhone and the incredible world of Apps available for these devices, the EDMS doesn’t stop at miniaturizing 1990; it blows the doors off of what was conceivable with environmental data investigations. In other words, EDMS became the central brain of the environmental world.

Let’s say you want to estimate and represent the volume of a contamination plume. Previously you would have to visit those endless filing cabinets, find the data you needed to determine the x,y, and z coordinates of the contamination, and put together a rocking spreadsheet. That spreadsheet would have to be printed out and handed to a cartographer or drafter. They would then take the data and pull survey plots of the area in question, mark out the wells, make some interpolation calculations between points, and then literally draw the boundaries on the paper maps. Oh, you want that in 3D? Well you better go down the hall and talk to the graphical artist about rendering that for you.

Today, you sit at your computer, run a quick report pulling in the dates and wells within your study area, open an environmental visualization tool like GIS or EVS, connect the GIS or EVS to the EDMS, and a few clicks later you are staring at a visually pleasing 3D image of your plume, complete with volume calculations.

Thanks to EDMS you went from rifling through dusty warehouses of filing cabinets and endless staff meetings where you attempt to communicate your needs in another technical language to the drafters and artists to sitting in your cushy office chair with your laptop, large mug of coffee and your bobblehead doll cheering you on.

EDMS is powerful, well thought out, and built with the inquisitive scientist in mind. Its purpose is to organize your data so that you can spend your time analyzing that data. It then simplifies the process of communicating that analysis by directly conversing with other computer programs that handle the sexy graphical parts.

An EDMS is not, however, smarter than you are. It's a computer program. The age old adage of garbage in, garbage out is as true, if not more so, with EDMS than with any other computer program. Care, patience, and diligence must be taken when setting up an EDMS, loading data into an EDMS, and reporting from an EDMS.

Think back to 1990. How many millions of dollars did companies spend developing and maintaining their intricate project naming conventions and filing systems? How frustrating was it trying to find that one piece of data that wasn't named properly under the naming convention or that got misplaced in the wrong file folder? How many endless hours did you spend looking for that data that was going to make the difference in your report? Why do you think companies hired corporate librarians and developed those intricate naming and filing systems?

An EDMS should not be treated or thought of any differently. It must be well thought out, well managed, well funded, and well cared for. Luckily, the data is digital and problems can be fixed rather quickly, but isn't it better to never have the problem in the first place? Take your time, think it out, plan it out, try it out, plan it out again, and then roll it out with the right controls in place. If you do, you will be up and running before you know it and the smile on that bobblehead doll will look less mocking and more encouraging.

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