The integration of GL documents with the research information system on occupational safety and health

Daniela Luzi, CNR/IRPPS, Maria Castriotta, ISPESL
Mariarosaria Manco and Renza Mazzucco, LINK s.r.l., Roma

Abstract

The paper presents the results of a joint project between the Italian National Institute of Safety and Health at Work and the Italian National Research Council. It illustrates the choices and main features in the development of the RIS-OSH system (Research Information System on Occupational Safety and Health). This system has been developed giving particular attention to the organisational improvement of the production, collection, preservation and diffusion of institutionally generated information, emphasising the importance of the quality control of the information produced during the project lifecycle. The paper gives the description of the workflow, which outlines the interaction between the various actors involved in the process of supplying and diffusing results. Finally the integration of the RIS-OSH system with the GL database and the global system architecture are described.

Introduction

In recent years a growing number of Italian scientific institutions - universities, research organisations - and governmental bodies have started using network technologies, in order to make information concerning their projects available with modes that range from the availability of web pages to the consultation of databases, as well as the retrieval of the documents resulting from the research projects. These systems have various purposes; they satisfy the need to diffuse results within the scientific community, become useful instruments for technological transfer to potential users of the results and, in a broader sense, to society, which plays an increasingly active role in scientific policy making. As the assessment issues take hold in Italy, these systems also assume ever-greater importance since they make it possible to perform qualitative and quantitative analyses that are of use in making choices concerning research policy.

In 1997, the Italian National Institute of Safety and Health at Work (ISPESL) set up a database containing approximately 500 records referring to projects carried out between 1996 and 1998. This archive was based on a "static concept", i.e. the data was entered when projects had already reached an advanced phase and updates were made difficult by the lack of a constant, co-ordinated data flow. On the basis of this past experience, and of the critical points that emerged from the update procedures adopted, a totally new product was planned to enable the exploitation of new technologies and to redesign the organisational model; thus improving the information flow connected to the creation of a research database. For this reason, in 2003 a joint ISPESL – CNR (the Italian National Research Council) project was launched, which had two main objectives:

- to analyse the process of activation of ISPESL research projects and identify the technologies best suited to improving it, with particular regard to work organisation and result diffusion, as well as to develop an information system on research projects funded by ISPESL to external commissioning parties;
- to improve the diffusion of information on research through the integration of information on projects with the other electronic archives that constitute ISPESL's documentation patrimony. A first step towards this integration was made by connecting the new system with the pre-existing database on Grey Literature (GL), (http://www.ispesl.it/lg/default.htm).

The first objective aims at attaining organisational and technical-scientific advantages. On the one hand improvements in inter and intra-departmental communication are achieved; consistency and standardisation of documentation relating to the project are assured; administration procedures are simplified by reductions in the time required to activate projects and diffuse information, thus also improving process control and monitoring. On the other, the advantages expected relate to an enhancement in the Institute's visibility and prestige; the possibility of performing scientific and economic assessment of research activities and the availability of an instrument for future research activity programming.

The second objective, that of integrating the research information system (hereinafter referred to as RIS-OSH, Research Information System in Occupational Safety and Health) with the database on GL, stems from the need to make the best possible use of the products of research. They are primarily constituted by the deliverables presented at the end of the projects, i.e. those GL documents that are identified as Activity Reports in the GL database. The explicit relationship between the description of the project and its results has the primary advantage of improving the complex process of technological transfer, favoured by the diffusion of the information contained in the deliverables. The