

Why ESDAL cannot be a complete management solution for SOAs

Serco, the ESDAL website contractor for the Highways Agency, sometimes tries to convey the impression that ESDAL offers a complete management service to Structure Owning Authorities (SOA's) for managing and checking abnormal load notifications. But there are two completely factual reasons why this cannot be so.

Firstly, using ESDAL to submit abnormal load notifications is not compulsory. Updated Regulations for abnormal load notifications were made by Parliament as recently as 2003, and the Highways Agency state on the ESDAL website that they have no intention of changing any legislation. ESDAL therefore will in the medium term only handle a proportion of abnormal load notifications.

In fact, with Phase 4 imminent, immediate indications from hauliers suggest that, because of the complicated and time-consuming nature of the new website, very few notifications are being routed through ESDAL. But in due course the website will probably be simplified and improved, and the number will increase.

Thus SOAs have no alternative but to continue to operate management systems which both handle the many notifications submitted directly to them by fax and email, as well as dealing with notifications submitted through the ESDAL website. The choice is to operate an in-house system to manage direct notifications, and either use ESDAL online to manage notifications submitted through ESDAL or handle these with the same or a second in-house system.

*At Cascade, we believe it makes sense to use an in-house management system which manages and completely integrates notifications by fax and mail from both sources. This is what Cascade's *** ABLOADS *** software offers to SOAs.*

The second principal reason why ESDAL cannot be a complete system is more practical, and applies to all notifications submitted through it.

The object of the abnormal loads notification process is to give SOAs the opportunity to prevent hauliers making movements which could damage their structures. If a notification entered in ESDAL is likely to lead to a problem with a structure or structures on a route, the 'buck' still stops with the SOA, who has to respond within the legal notification period to stop the proposed movement taking place. ESDAL does not relieve an SOA from ultimate responsibility for its own structures.

But ESDAL provides no facility for an SOA to respond back to a haulier. SOAs are expected to contact hauliers directly, outside of ESDAL, if they need to respond.

*Thus, again, SOAs requires a management system outside of ESDAL to deal with and record these important communications. And again, this is exactly what Cascade's *** ABLOADS *** software provides.*