

A Range of Uses for Stock Assessor

In this article Chris Starling, a consultant for National Energy Services, looks at the range of ways people use our Stock Assessor software.

We introduced Stock Assessor, our energy database, at the end of 2008 to coincide with the requirement to produce Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) in the rental sector. As has been pointed out in previous Social Housing News articles, RDSAP was developed specifically to provide a standard way of assessing the energy efficiency of existing dwellings and since its introduction it has created a new standard.

Our aim in developing Stock Assessor was two-fold: to provide a tool to replace our previous SAP 2001-based energy database Probase and also to provide a way for social landlords and others to record RDSAP data, issue, organize and manage EPCs. Given that it is now almost two years since its introduction, this seemed like a good opportunity to look at the range of ways it is being used in practice.

EPC management and stock reporting

A housing association client bought Stock Assessor – though they also had an Asset Management system – so that they could use it focus on the energy aspects of their stock. Initially it was purchased to manage and organise their EPC data. They could do this by lodging EPCs directly from the software or by subsequently importing the data if the certificate had been lodged on our online portal, *NES one*. But the plan was to use this data to refine and improve the energy data they had for their stock.

National Energy Services' consultancy team assisted them to populate the database with address information, bringing in the EPC data as it became available. The association has in-house IT resources which have been used to make the best use of the software; supported, from time to time, by our consultancy team.

Having lodged about 3,000 EPCs they wanted to use this high-quality energy data to clone a significant element of their properties. The 'transfer survey data' in Stock Assessor simplified this process greatly. Using the EPC data in this way had the benefit of improving the data they held for stock reporting and also anticipated future requirements for certificates.

Compatibility with previous stock data and using partial datasets

In creating Stock Assessor we recognised that many organisations had a wealth of data using the pre-existing 'Level 0', Enhanced Level 0 and 'Level 1' formats and we built the ability to import from NHER Probase right in to the programme. But some organisations were still collecting this kind of data during condition and other surveys and needed a way of evaluating the energy data.

A local authority wanted to use Stock Assessor to assess data collected in respect of National Indicator 187, which assesses the extent of fuel poverty. The defined format for data collection

described the use of 'enhanced level zero' which was based on a previous version of SAP – SAP 2001. The difficulty with this was that there is no current software that uses this data collection format.

This client provided the dataset it had collected to make the fuel poverty assessment to us and we mapped it to fields in Stock Assessor. This was something relatively straightforward that a competent Microsoft Access 2007 (or Excel) user could do but because of time constraints it was more effective for National Energy Services to do it as part of our consultancy project.

Because the data provided was not a full RDSAP dataset we made use of Stock Assessor's ability to infer up from 'partial datasets' and produce a SAP rating. Clearly the rating is far less accurate than it would have been had a full dataset been used, but for the indicative purposes to which it was to be put, it was entirely adequate.

Many clients want to make use of the data they already have (using the previous data formats) but want to combine this with the information they are collecting as part of their obligations to provide EPCs. Stock Assessor provides them with the ability to do this and improve the data as and when it comes available.

SAP is great for benchmarking – but every household is different

RDSAP is a fantastic tool for comparing one property with another by using the same defaults in terms of occupancy, heating patterns and location. But while this is a good thing if you want to compare properties in differing parts of the UK it is not so useful if you want to assess a household's potential fuel costs and the ability adequately heat a property.

We recently undertook some very successful workshops focussing on Stock Assessor's ability to reflect the location of the dwelling, the precise number of occupants, to more accurately reflect the pattern of heating and reflect total fuel costs, energy use and emissions.

Stock Assessor can undertake standard RDSAP assessments and produces the associated results. But it also includes the NHER calculation engine which uses the postcode to calculate fuel costs, energy use and emissions based on location. In principle, if exactly the same dwelling, occupied in the same way, was located in Newcastle rather than Truro the NHER calculation would reflect the increased fuel costs, energy used and carbon emissions.

Furthermore it also allows the user to reflect the actual number of occupants of the dwelling, vary the heating pattern and appliance use – each of which can affect heating costs. Finally the software allows the user to edit the NHER fuel costs, by providing the actual tariffs paid by the occupant rather than the general defaults.

We have tried to develop Stock Assessor in such a way as to be useful for many purposes – and our clients seem to agree!

If you would like more information about Stock Assessor or NES consultancy services, please contact us on 01908 442111 or enquiry@nesltd.co.uk.