

Do You Really Know How Well Your Plant is Running?

By Brian Gibson, P. Eng., Machine Automation Inc.

In today's "no-time" environment it can be a tall order to stay on top of everything that's going on. With thousands of devices to monitor and problems to deal with, plant managers can get so sidetracked that they haven't time to see the full picture.

Sometimes something as simple as installing a desktop software application can make a big difference. You have the data in your control system, whether DCS or PLC based, that tells you what's going on. If that data is presented more effectively, it also can tell you where the big problems are for immediate attention. Put out the big fires, and the small ones will take care of themselves.

Easy-to-use software tools can:

- Prioritize problem areas quickly
- Provide an at-a-glance view of the plant's operating stability
- Allow continuous improvement projects to quickly target areas for immediate returns on investment

Data contained within your plant alarm systems is the key. Plant alarms alert you to conditions that are out of specification, unsafe, or unusual. The total number of alarms in a plant at any point in time summarizes the plant's stability. On-line graphical displays of this information can summarize thousands of plant events in real-time. One such product, AlarmAnalyst® provides:

- Top 10 problem areas
- How long fault conditions are lasting
- If and when Alarm Burst rates are excessive
- Operator actions in response to plant conditions.

"AlarmAnalyst® was developed as a result of commissioning experiences. We needed to quickly identify sources of operating problems to get the plant into a stable mode of operation and we used alarms for this purpose," comments Jon Dun, lead engineer at Machine Automation Inc.

Bill MacDonald, chief operator at CCI waste recycling, credits AlarmAnalyst with getting his plant up and running smoothly. "During plant commissioning, we used AlarmAnalyst to help us prioritize our work, and within a few weeks, equipment fault and process interruptions had been reduced by 80%." "And with a fifteen second glance during their shift, operations supervisors know that the plant is running the way it should, or, more importantly, see the beginnings of plant instability," he adds.

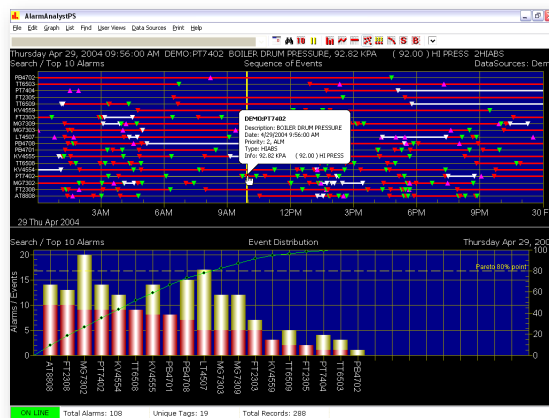


Fig 1 Some of the high level on-line views showing equipment fault rates, durations and operator actions fully integrated with continuous plant data.

Everyone feels the effects of the intensely competitive global marketplace. Improving plant performance is one way to stay in the game.

Machine Automation is a developer of software tools for plant engineers. For more information on AlarmAnalyst® and Machine Automation, please visit our website: www.machineautomation.org.