



Toughbooks in Action

BlueScope Steel implements Panasonic Toughbooks for improved productivity and safety



BlueScope Steel, one of Australia and New Zealand's leading steel companies, is implementing ruggedised Panasonic Toughbook CF-18 notebooks, to improve productivity and safety of vehicles at their Port Kembla Steelworks.

Panasonic Toughbooks connected to a GPS receiver and running programmable logic controller (PLC) software, have been fitted in locomotives, cranes and forklifts

to track vehicle movements, control traffic flow, and manage product inventory.

Drivers control the system via the Panasonic Toughbook LCD touch screen which is fitted into the vehicle.

Each Toughbook has ruggedised features designed to prevent damage in harsh outdoor working environments – protecting against impact, vibration, water and dust - and has a swivel LCD design that converts from a notebook to a rugged touchscreen tablet PC.



Panasonic Recommends Microsoft® Windows® XP Professional.

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A major criterion for the selection of the Toughbook was reliability and low total cost of ownership (TCO). The

Toughbook is suitable for extreme weather outdoor use and is far less susceptible to damage, resulting in better reliability, low maintenance, longer operational lifespan and a low TCO.

“Considering that the notebooks were going to be placed within high vibration environments such as the locomotives, it was imperative we used a device that could withstand a bit of punishment – and the rugged capabilities of the Panasonic Toughbook made it an ideal choice for our fleet,” said Chris Reid, Senior Automation Engineer, BlueScope Steel. “The hardware component is the central element of the tracking system, hence ruggedness was an extremely important requirement.”

“Computer systems we have used in the past were unreliable and couldn’t take a lot of wear and tear,” Reid added. “The first Toughbook we implemented is still in the same locomotive two years later, and has never needed repair.

The interior conditions that the Toughbooks are placed in can sometimes reach up to 50 degrees Celsius, and an ordinary laptop couldn’t withstand those temperatures. It definitely costs less in the long term for a ruggedised product.”

BlueScope Steel produces a wide range of vital building and manufacturing components, specialising in flat steel products. Its Port Kembla steelworks in New South Wales is the largest steel production facility in Australia, and one of the world’s lowest-cost producers of steel products.

The vehicle tracking system uses Cimplicity software from GE Fanuc, running on a Windows XP operating system. The Cimplicity software enabled BlueScope Steel to build a tracking system for the locomotives, cranes and forklifts.

For the locomotives, a GPS unit records the latitude and longitude of the vehicle and sends this information to the PLC running on the Toughbook. The PLC converts this information into local grid coordinates for local driver display. The information is also transmitted via radio back to a central computer, which displays the location of all locomotives in the fleet to the central operator who coordinates locomotive movements.

“The Toughbooks are extremely versatile for any number of situations, and standardisation was a major consideration when choosing a notebook. Our drivers have been extremely happy with the Toughbooks, as they’ve been 100 percent reliable. The Toughbook takes everything you throw at it.”

As well as further installations in other vehicles and other areas of operation such as the product despatch and berth areas, Springhill and Western Port plants, BlueScope Steel envisages plans to utilise Toughbooks as desktop PCs or portable devices to carry-out stock takes using the Toughbook with a USB scanner.



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