

Moodle Server Proposal for HedgeHog Training

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There is an urgent need for a learning management system (LMS) to manage online training of the HedgeHog (HH) inspection report program for public health inspectors, administrative staff and managers in Environmental Health.

Currently, Calgary and Central zones are utilizing HH and in the upcoming months, Hedgehog will be rolled out to North and South zones. Past training of staff in the use of HH has revealed that training must occur prior to system introduction, during the initial phases of system use and ongoing as the system is updated and modified. There are only two staff, both situated in Calgary, who are experienced in training staff in HH. These staff are designated IT specialists with a number of roles and it is therefore unrealistic to have these staff provide face-to-face training for all staff the North and South zones.

In addition to the current training structure being unrealistic, the face-to-face training process is neither cost nor time efficient. Staff are currently located in over 60 offices and the time and cost to have these staff travel to central sites to receive face-to-face training is substantial. With the original rollout of HH in the Calgary Zone, the average training of each staff was two days of formal training, as well as additional time spent in face-to-face and phone consultation with the trainers. The training also had to be structured by space available to accommodate the training and the need for specialized training depending on the position of the trainee. A more sustainable approach would be to incorporate the use of a LMS that can accessed by staff and management at their convenience to complete their personalized training. The LMS would manage HH training in the North and South zones as well as new staff training and upgrading for all staff in the four zones.

The proposed LMS is [Moodle](#). The reason why Moodle is being proposed is because AHS currently has a Moodle server and the system has been working successfully in several departments. Also, Moodle is [open-source software](#) so there would be no hard costs to the department, only a time commitment for the development of the course pages and content. Another advantage of Moodle being open-source, is that it is not impacted by the numerous mergers of vendor-based products that have been occurring

(Panettieri, 2007) and is more likely to be a reliable, well supported system in the upcoming years, especially considering the large, global Moodle community that exists.

Moodle is considered by many experts as an excellent choice for an LMS. It is an established system (est. 2003) and has been growing and improving every day. There are currently 65,499 Moodle sites in 219 countries and nearly 6 million courses have been developed (Moodle.org: Moodle Statistics). Moodle is rated as the 8th top tool for learning by the [Centre for Learning & Performance Technologies Institute](#), in the same class as tools such as Twitter, Google docs and Skype. This is compared to the top vendor-based LMS, Blackboard, which placed #89th on the list, down 21 points from 2010 (Top 100 Tools 2011).

Moodle provides many benefits to training in an online environment. [Digital content](#) such as [screencasting](#) videos (which will be a valuable tool in creating HH lessons), powerpoints and word documents are easily uploaded onto the site. Moodle also enables [quiz creation](#) that will ensure that trainees understand content in a lesson. Another significant advantage of Moodle is the ability for management to [track staff progress and test results](#), which will help ensure that staff are completing the necessary training and are competent working in HH before using it in the field. Management will also appreciate how Moodle will assist in the standardization of practices through consistent training and identifying necessary re-training, which is a critical part of Environmental Health's credibility.

The creation of a HH knowledge hub, will be enabled by Moodle's [forum](#) feature. Trainees can post questions on the forum and other trainees or trainers can respond to their question. Trainers can be sent emails automatically when there are new posts to the forum so that they can respond in a timely fashion. Forums can be categorized and a FAQs section could be developed. The [forum search block](#) allows trainees to easily search the forum for key words or phrases to find information on their question. In addition, Moodle has a [chat](#) function, whereby trainees and trainers can chat synchronously, when training is being completed. This may be quite useful if there are designated days that training occurs in certain offices. An audio chat option (such as the free [Open Meetings](#)) could also be installed into Moodle.

Moodle is an intuitive system to manage courses (Perkins & Pfaffman, 2006). As an AHS server is already operating, once our department receives our HH course page, it will be easily set up. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to create a trial Moodle page for HH in my Master's course which will greatly enable the setup of the official HH training course page on the AHS server. Once the page, users and content are set up, the system is very intuitive for trainees. It shouldn't take trainees much time to familiarize themselves with the system before diving into the training.

Once the LMS is in place for HH training, there will be the opportunity to create new course pages for other training needs such as occupational health and safety, advanced workplace and InfoShare courses. The LMS will be able to track staff progress and completion of these courses, enable the creation of knowledge hubs in specialized topics and increase standardization of practices in more areas of work.

This is the perfect opportunity to initiate the use of Moodle as the pressing need for the system has been clearly identified. Once the system is operational for Environmental Health, cost savings, standardization, staff performance and ongoing training support will be substantially elevated in the training and use of HH and for any future training that is initiated.

Bibliography

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