As HSA Scrutiny of Permit-to-Work Intensifies, Irish Manufacturers Move to Replace Paper-Based Systems

Friday 26 June, 2026

As the Health and Safety Authority sharpens its inspection programme around permit-to-work and contractor control, Cork-based EHA Soft Solutions reports rising demand from manufacturers seeking to replace paper-based permit processes with its mai(TM) electronic work permit system.

CORK, IRELAND — Permit-to-work and contractor control have become recurring themes in the Health and Safety Authority's 2026 inspection programme, placing the systems that regulated manufacturers use to authorise and control high-risk work under closer scrutiny than ever. In response, EHA Soft Solutions — developer of the mai(TM) active contractor management platform — reports a marked increase in enquiries for its electronic work permit system, including from manufacturers who have undergone recent HSA inspections.

The shift reflects a wider change in what regulators expect. Where a permit system was once judged on whether the paperwork existed, inspectors now ask a harder question: can the site demonstrate operational control at the moment work is carried out? A signature on a permit can be obtained in seconds. Confirming that the right operative, with current competency and an approved method statement, is cleared to perform a specific task in specific conditions takes a system.

"The question we hear inspectors are asking is a simple one," said Dr. Dan Gallagher, Founder and Managing Director of EHA Soft Solutions. "Show me every permit active on this site right now — who issued it, who is working under it, and what controls are in place. If it takes more than a minute to answer that accurately, the system is running on paper, and paper can no longer carry the complexity of a modern manufacturing site."

CHECK THE PERSON BEFORE THE PERMIT ISSUES

The mai(TM) work permit module addresses the failure points that recur wherever high-risk work is authorised — whether the work is carried out by contractors or by a company's own engineering and maintenance staff. It enforces completeness at every stage: a permit cannot progress with required checks unanswered or mandatory fields left blank, eliminating the missing-information gaps that paper permits routinely carry. Configurable approval workflows route each permit through the right named authorisers for the work in question.

Where contractors are involved, the system adds a further layer. Before a permit is issued, mai(TM) checks the operative's real-time compliance status — induction, competency, insurance currency, and certifications — directly from the contractor portal, confirming that the required records are present and in date. A non-compliant operative cannot obtain a permit, regardless of the pressure at the gate. Where a risk assessment and method statement has been reviewed and approved, that approved RAMS links directly to the permit, connecting what was authorised to what is actually performed.

The system provides a live dashboard of every active permit across a site — by area, work type, contractor, and status — giving security, EHS, engineering, and management the same real-time picture. Every action on a permit is recorded with a date- and time-stamped change log, producing the kind of defensible audit trail an inspector or investigator can follow after the fact: who issued, who accepted, who changed what, and when. For organisations with an existing permit process, the compliance check and RAMS linkage can be delivered as an API, enhancing the current workflow rather than replacing it.

TWO GAPS PAPER SYSTEMS LEAVE OPEN

Two operational gaps get specific attention. The mai(TM) work permit app lets the issuer walk the work area and sign off at the point of work — on the area itself, on a mobile device, not from a remote control room — verifying conditions rather than assuming them, and capturing photographs as part of the record. And at the other end of the job, the system enforces the closeout step that paper processes most often miss: the final client sign-off that formally closes a completed permit. When a contractor or fitter marks the work complete, the permit returns to the client for that closing authorisation — the single most commonly skipped step in manual systems, and the one inspectors increasingly ask to see.

ONE PILLAR OF A COMPLETE CONTRACTOR MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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Electronic work permits are one pillar of mai(TM) Active Contractor Management — EHA's platform for managing every contractor on a regulated site. The same system runs the online contractor portal, gate check-in and check-out, integration with access control and visitor management, AI-assisted review of RAMS and safety statements, and online induction training. A permit is never issued in isolation: it is issued against a contractor whose induction, insurance, competency, and site access have already been checked by the platform behind it.

Manufacturers reviewing their permit systems in response to HSA inspections are increasingly finding that permits are one visible symptom of a broader need — consistent, verifiable control of every contractor on site, every day. EHA's approach to that challenge is set out at ehasoft.com.

"Work permits are where the consequences land, which is why the HSA is focused there," Gallagher added. "But a permit is only as good as the contractor compliance behind it. The reason we built mai(TM) as a single system is that a permit, the person, their training, their insurance, and their method statement cannot sit in five disconnected places. It has to be one ecosystem, or the gaps are exactly where incidents happen."

The enquiries reaching EHA span manufacturers reviewing their permit systems ahead of inspection and those acting directly on inspection findings. The common thread, the company notes, is a recognition that the era of the paper permit — signed under pressure, filed in a drawer, impossible to verify in real time — is coming to an end in regulated manufacturing.

— ENDS —

REGULATORY CONTEXT

• The Health and Safety Authority has published its Programme of Work 2026, the second annual programme under its 2025-2027 Strategy Statement, setting out a risk-based inspection and enforcement programme focused on areas of greatest risk.

• The HSA maintains specific published guidance on Work Permits and Isolation of Equipment, covering permit-to-work and lockout/tagout controls for high-risk maintenance and contractor activity.

• Industry analysis of the HSA's 2026 programme has highlighted contractor control and permit-controlled high-risk work as recurring inspection themes in regulated manufacturing, with online inductions and verifiable digital competence records identified as the expected standard.

• Against a reported rise in work-related fatalities, the HSA has intensified its national inspection programme, increasing both the volume and the rigour of workplace inspections across high-risk sectors.

Sources: Health and Safety Authority (hsa.ie) — Programme of Work 2026; Work Permits and Isolation of Equipment guidance. Inspection-theme characterisation drawn from published industry analysis of the HSA 2026 programme.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About EHA Soft Solutions. Founded in 2002 and headquartered at the National Software Campus in Cork, EHA Soft Solutions develops and operates mai(TM), an active contractor management platform used by regulated pharmaceutical and industrial manufacturers in Ireland and internationally. mai(TM) manages contractor compliance in real time — at the gate, on site, and across the project lifecycle — in the operational space that corporate EHSQ systems are not designed to reach. The platform spans gate access control, online induction, work permits, AI-assisted document review, insurance and chemical safety intelligence, and contractor performance management, supported by a dedicated managed-service team.

About the mai(TM) work permit module. mai(TM) electronic work permits check contractor compliance status before a permit is issued, link approved risk assessments and method statements directly to the permit, support configurable permit types and approval workflows, and provide live dashboard visibility of all active permits. The module operates standalone or integrates with existing permit and access control systems via API.

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