Whitepaper

Introduction to the RedFox v2 sensor system

A brief explanation of how the RedFox v2 sensor system is used to permanently detect crack growth in steel structures

VILLARI

Fatigue cracks and manual inspections

Heavily loaded steel structures such as large highway bridges, overhead travelling cranes, or container carrying cranes will risk fatigue cracking when they reach end-of life. This occurs due to cyclical heavy loading patterns over the course of their design life. To keep these vital assets safe, inspections are performed frequently to ensure crack growth is occurring within the acceptable rate. If unacceptable crack growth is detected, inspection intensity may be temporarily increased until repairs can be made to prevent further dangerous material fracture.

Detecting cracks on steel structures has, until now, been a matter of manual labor. It requires highly skilled personnel that is equipped with specific crack detection equipment. These types of inspections are referred to as Non-Destructive Testing or NDT.

Examples of popular NDT methods are magnetic particle inspection, die penetrant inspection, and ultrasonic testing. They are technologies based on different physical principles (capillary action, magnetism, and sound waves respectively) that provide a snapshot of cracks in the material at a specific point in time. By returning for a follow-up inspection at a later point in time the asset owner is informed of the development -or absence of- crack growth.
The critical areas that require inspection are often hard to reach and frequently require the use of aerial platforms or rope-access to be inspected. This substantially increases the complexity of the inspection operation leading to longer asset downtimes, more personnel on-site, and overall increasing inspection expenditure.

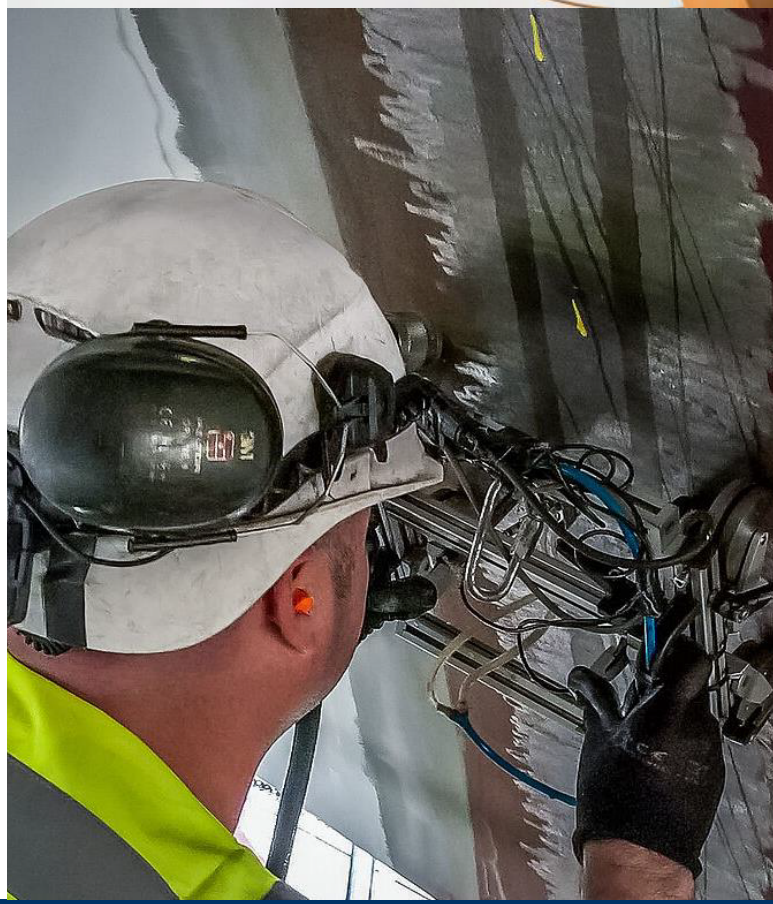

Figure 1 Inspection using Non-Destructive Testing (left), and hard to reach locations often require an aerial platform (right).

RedFox v2 Sensor unit

The RedFox v2 sensor system is a highly-advanced new monitoring system for detecting local crack growth in steel structures with permanently installed sensor strips. They allow assets to be monitored continuously without human intervention. The key system characteristics are summarized below:

- Wireless, making use of LoRaWAN
- Installation time of 5-10 minutes, no removal of paint or conservation required
- Affordable solution
- Up to 5 years battery life
- Local monitoring of critical welds and high-stress locations in sever weather conditions (IP66)

The sensor units consist of two parts: the control unit which contains the batteries, a wireless communication module, and a processor. The control unit is attached away from the crack detection area using magnets at the bottom of the unit and additional fastening straps. The control unit powers on every few hours to obtain crack detection measurements from the sensor strips, send these wirelessly to our office, and go back to sleep mode afterwards. The sensor strips consist of an array of magnetometers that collect magnetic field data at distinct points in time. Variations in this magnetic field data are picked up by our extensively tested algorithms and reported back to the customer as potential crack growth.

Due the fact that measurements are taken multiple times per day, cracks can be detected in a much earlier stage than with conventional methods, making it a very suitable warning system capable of flagging potential crack growth long before it becomes problematic.

Strips are available in two options: a rigid 50 mm sensor strip and a flexible 500 mm sensor strip used to cover more distance and cover a longer surface. A maximum of four sensor strips can be attached to a single control unit. The data is securily transmitted using LoRa, which is a protocol ideal for long-lasting and low-power monitoring applications such as the RedFox v2 Sensor Unit. More on LoRa can be found in the following link: https://www.actility.com/what-is-lora-and-lorawan/.

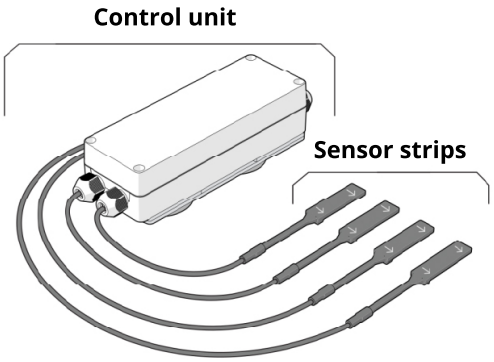

Figure 2 Control Unit and Sensor Strips.

Crack detection area

As mentioned in the previous page, Villari's sensor strips are capable of detecting crack growth at an early stage, comparable with some of the most advanced NDT technologies currently in the market. This holds true for a three-dimensional region around the strip with a radius of 15 mm which we define as the crack detection area.

This crack detection area enables a single strip to detect crack growth near one weld toe, while simultaneously detecting crack growth at the opposite weld toe and detecting crack growth from the root of the weld (sub-surface). This is schematically drawn in the figure below.
Crack length increase of more than 5 mm is certified detectable with our sensor strips, comparing us with Time-of-flight-diffraction and Phased-Array- Ultrasonic Testing in terms of detection capabilities. Outside of the crack detection zone, cracks can be detected at a slightly later stage than within the zone. More information on crack detection capabilities can be provided upon request.

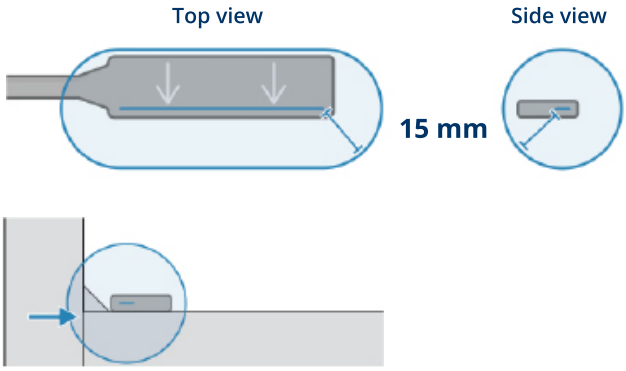

Figure 2 Crack detection zone top view (top left), side view (top right), when placed close to a fillet weld (bottom).

Disclosure of analysis results

The crack detection algorithm output for each sensor strip is automatically updated into an online dashboard environment which can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection.

From a clear overview page, a technical drawing of the assets shows the locations of the installed sensor strips. With a traffic light color coding system the customer is informed of potential crack growth activity occurring at each monitoring location. Green zones indicate an absence of crack growth activity near the strip, yellow zones indicate an increasing likelihood of crack growth, and red zones tell the customer that there is a significant chance of crack growth occurring near the strip. A pie chart shows the analysis outcome of all strips on an entire asset, which provides a direct insight into the status of crack growth activity on the entire asset in a quick overview

Examples of installed sensors, analysis output, and how trends over time are analyzed to detect potential crack growth or indicate an absence of crack growth on a variety of different assets and structural details is available upon request.

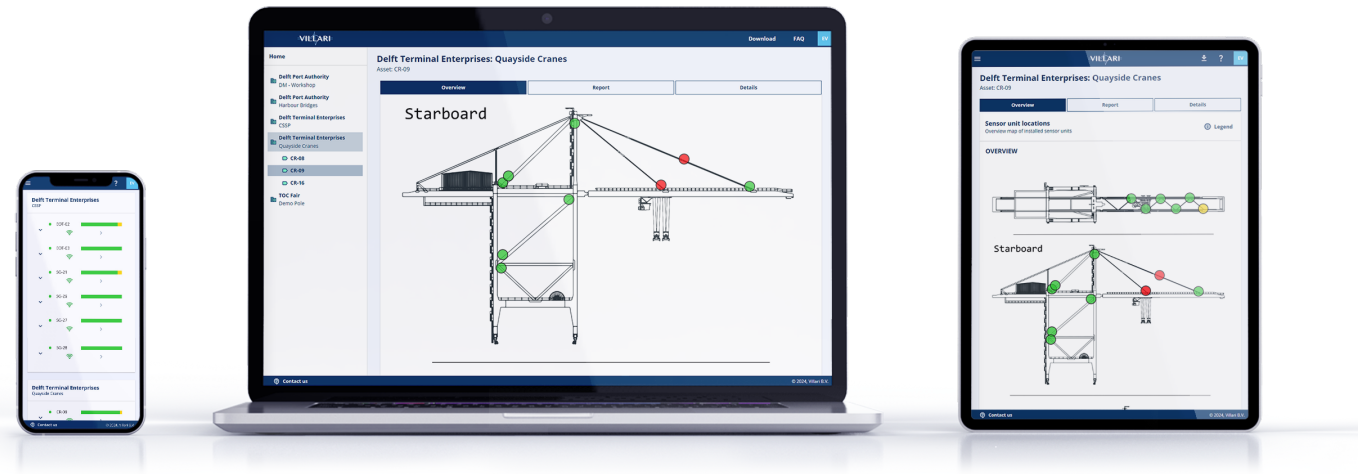

Figure 2 The Villari dashboard provides insights into crack growth from any device.

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Villari B.V. | Oostsingel 209, Delft, the Netherlands
mail@villari-technology.com | villari-technology.com