

Maintenance-Friendly Washracks

By Scot Ender

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The days of cleaning a washpad by hosing the oil, sludge and solids down the drain are becoming a distant memory. New compliance measures from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and strength charges by the publicly owned Treatment Works have maintenance facilities looking for more economical and environmentally friendly methods of handling the by-products of washing equipment and vehicles.

Take a look at your drainage trenches and sump collection areas. Are the grates and lids easily removable? Do the trenches readily separate oils and solids from the effluent? Is the collection sump capacity less than 150 gallons? Does your largest piece of equipment fit easily on the concrete pad?

If you can answer yes to all of the above, then you are on your way toward having a maintenance-friendly and environmentally advanced washrack. If not, there are several ways to easily retrofit an existing washrack and plenty of plans available to construct a new one that will help meet and exceed present and future environmental requirements and make maintenance a snap.

Ordinarily the two biggest culprits for creating headaches are oils and solids. Luckily a good trench and pit design will go a long way toward eliminating these problems. The physical characteristics of oil and many solids are conducive to separating them from water. Oil, as we know, will generally try to float and most solids will attempt to sink.

But if you add emulsifying, high pH soaps to the mix, along with drainage design that doesn't slow the water down prior to discharge, then you are restricting the natural physical characteristics that allow for good separation. And if you don't get good separation of oil and solids, you will be looking at excessive hauling fees and strength charges or added filter and maintenance costs if you recycle.

Retrofitting a series of weirs and baffles into an existing trench is a simple task. These additions will slow the water flow and enhance oil and solids separation. Where would you rather manage solids, in a shallow trench or in an eight-foot deep sump pit? The easier the solids are to clean out, the more often it will get done, thereby avoiding potential discharge problems.

Smaller sump collection areas **MUST** be maintained more often than the oversized pit. This maintenance could prevent mucky solids from becoming a hazardous waste and could save you thousands of dollars in disposal costs.

If you're planning on building a new washpad, find some ideas other than the old center-trench drainage design. By anticipating problems, such as heavy solids, you can reduce maintenance time and avoid potential disposal problems.

One drainage design that is getting a lot of looks these days is the side clean-out design. This type of pad eliminates the trench drain altogether and captures oils and solids in an area that can be scooped out with a small front-end loader. What could be simpler?

Take a closer look at your washrack maintenance methods and time spent with such tasks. There's a good chance that minor changes could pay big dividends, not only in time saved, but also in potential disposal fees and environmental liability.



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