

ENVIRONMENTAL RULES

Equipment Wash-Water Disposal Options

By Scot Ender

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The maintenance shop supervisor watched intently as the dirty wash-water flowed into the floor trench. He had always taken pride in the condition of their heavy equipment; not only did clean equipment make routine maintenance easier and extend equipment life, it just made the company look better.

Nearly everyday some part of the fleet was being pressure-washed. Trucks, loaders and pavers got full of crud so fast he sometimes wondered how they ran at all. And for all the washing they did, he had never given the dirty wash-water a thought. But today he was giving it his full attention. Today it was his number one priority after learning about the disaster that had struck their competitor just down the road.

ABC Construction had been trying to sell its old maintenance site for several years and had seemingly worked out a deal. But the potential buyer had demanded an environmental audit before closing and the test results were disastrous. The soil was heavily contaminated with oil, grease and cadmium. The culprit was two decades of polluted wash-water being discharged to the same drainfield and surface area.

The maintenance supervisor had been called into a meeting that morning and was pointedly informed that his equipment cleaning practices had better not result in a similar situation. Unfortunately, their shop had no city sewer access and he had been discharging his wash-water to a drainfield or to the surface, just like his counterpart down the road.

After doing a bit of research on proper disposal of wash-water, he decided to call the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). They informed him that he had four

alternatives. He could continue to discharge the water if it was clean enough to meet "Drinking Water Standards"; he could hook up to dirty sewer; he could capture all discharge in a holding tank, or he could purchase a closed-loop recycling system.

Well, he knew that city sewer wasn't available and when he received the fax from MPCA detailing "Drinking Water Standards," he knew he could never conform to those. That left him with putting in a holding tank or a recycling system.

A holding tank sounded simple. Instead of having their effluent pipe discharge to the drainfield, he'd merely route it into the holding tank. A 3000 gallon tank would cost him about \$10,000 and he knew from the flow meter on his pressure washer line that he'd have to pump the tank nearly every week. When he got some estimates on hauling fees and putting in a monitoring system for an underground tank, he decided to take a look at recycling.

Researching a recycling system was a bit more complicated, but it appeared that a unit designed to meet his specs would cost between \$15-20,000. At first glance this appeared to be out of the ballpark, but after balancing the anticipated savings in soap usage and hauling fees against the higher capital costs, he thought he could make a case either way.

So, armed with the regulatory information from the MPCA and proposals from storage tank and recycling system distributors, he went to see the boss.

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