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INSIGHTS

Vol. XIII No. 1, January 2001

DRAINING EXPERIENCE



Back when "ecology" was only an obscure word in the dictionary, just about anything went down the shop drain or nearby storm sewers. And even those environmentally aware companies that scrupulously recovered crankcase oil, transmission fluid and antifreeze, things like "simple" wash water often weren't seen as a problem.

Times have changed! It's estimated that a tractor-trailer unit, washed just once a month, will produce about two pounds of pollutants, including grease, oil, creosotes, sediment, zinc, lead and other heavy metals mixed in with the water run-off from that single wash. Multiply that across the size of an entire fleet, and you can see the significant volumes of harmful effluents that could pour into the local water table if untreated.

Basically, there are three categories of polluted water that a truck fleet facility must deal with: wastewater, truck wash water and storm water runoff.

Wastewater

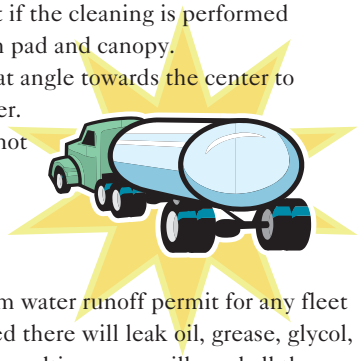
Wastewater is water produced from normal housekeeping activities within a shop. Often containing grease and oil, this water typically must be treated by at least the use of an oil-water separator sump before the outflow can legally go into a sewer system, where it will ultimately encounter a treatment plant that will cleanse it even further. Below are some useful tips to try to prevent contaminants from getting into shop wastewater in the first place:

- Prevent effluents from entering the drain by making certain all fluids, clean-up materials and spent solvents are collected in approved waste receptacles and disposed of in accordance with federal, provincial and local regulations.
- Collect and recycle used oil, transmission fluid, brake fluid and coolants.
- Use absorbents to clean up minor fluid leaks and spills. Granular types can be sprinkled on a spill to aid clean up. A variety of sponges can also be useful to soak up or contain spills.
- Drains should be located away from work areas, and working surfaces between drains should be swept often and kept dry.
- Wash parts in self-contained recirculating sinks.

Truck Wash Water

If a fleet owner washes his own trucks, the exact process will depend on where the company is located. Some municipalities still allow water to flow directly into their systems, although most demand at least the same pre-treatment given to shop wastewater. Another option is to install a "closed loop" water recycling system that ensures that wash water is retained, treated and used again. Here are some general suggestions for environmentally enlightened washing:

- An indoor site is preferred, but if the cleaning is performed outside, be sure to have a wash pad and canopy.
- Build wash bays with floors that angle towards the center to contain large quantities of water.
- Train wash bay employees to not spray over open batteries and tractor fifth wheels.



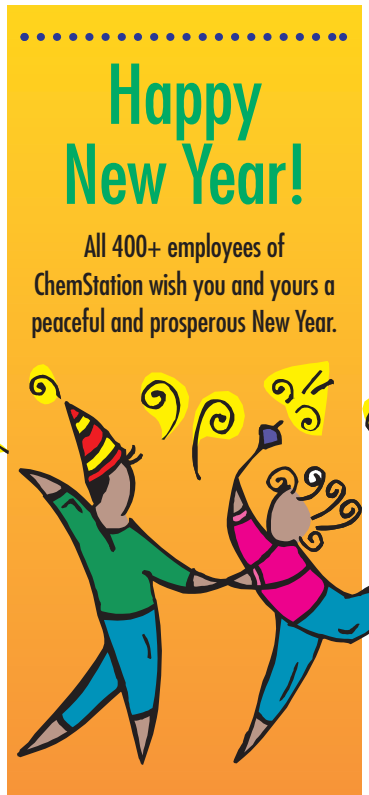
Storm Water Runoff

Many jurisdictions require a storm water runoff permit for any fleet yard. Over time, the trucks parked there will leak oil, grease, glycol, fuel and the like. A heavy rain or melting snow will send all these pollutants to the nearest storm, ditch or stream. Actions that can help keep truck-operation fluids from becoming an environmental headache include:

- Keep batteries and drums of chemicals under cover. Clean and resurface areas that are already contaminated.
- Build drain basins around fuel islands to catch spills from fuel nozzles. Fuel islands should be covered, if possible.
- Place secondary-containment barriers around all above-ground oil and fuel storage tanks.
- If contamination potential of runoff water is high, install a pre-treatment system or some other sort of impoundment where storm water is collected, and contaminants can be skimmed from the surface.

Wherever you're located, check with local authorities regarding wastewater regulations. Choosing the irresponsible approach to save some overhead dollars now could cost your firm – and the environment – a lot more later. ■

Source: Cleaner Times

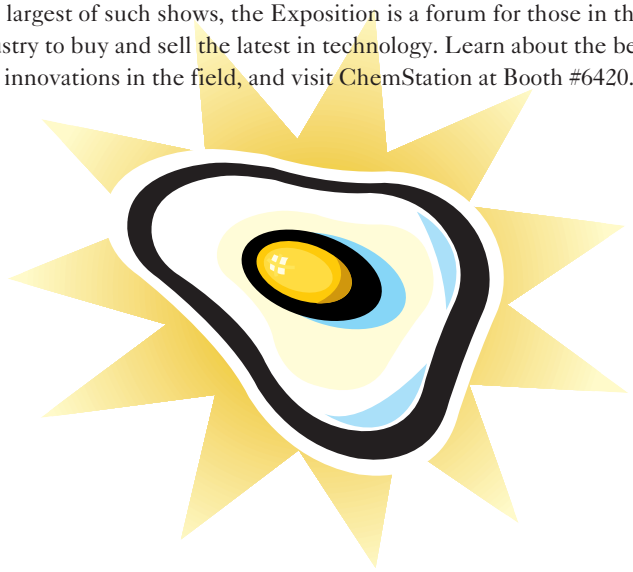


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Lightning Protection Institute

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