

Cleaning petroleum spills made environmentally safe

Miracle chemical makes petroleum spills more safe during clean-up process

BY CARRIE KEELER
of The Peninsula Gateway

Mike Houser manages eight independent Chevron stations, including the Chevron in Point Fosdick. He is trying to spread the word about FM 186, which is used at all eight stations to clean petroleum spills.

"It's one of those products that kind of knocks your socks off," Houser said. "It's totally going to change things in terms of how we clean spills."

FM 186 is produced by Environmental Chemical Solutions Inc. of Gig Harbor.

According to the company, when FM 186 is sprayed onto petroleum products, the toxicity is neutralized. The result is a substance that people could swallow with no harmful effects.

This chemical can potentially solve many concerns about nonpoint pollution.

Nonpoint pollution comes from a variety of small sources such as farms, boats, roads, watered lawns

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and storm drains. The cumulative effect of nonpoint pollution can easily destroy a watershed.

Ed Grubbs, the president of the company, began developing FM 186 through research into storm water drainage. The chemical was developed in 1996 and placed on the market in Sept. 1998.

Partial list of customers

Current customers include Peninsula Light Company, Gig Harbor Fire District 5, many Chevron independent stations, Weyerhaeuser, Gateway Equipment, Travis Air Force Base, Sacramento International Airport, the Port of Portland, Petro Card and General Petroleum.

Law governing waters

RCW 90.48.080 governs the discharge of polluting matter into waters in Washington state. It reads: "It shall be unlawful for any person to throw, drain, run or otherwise discharge into any of the waters of this state, or to cause, permit or suffer to be thrown, run, drained, allowed to seep or otherwise discharged into such waters any organic or inorganic matter that shall cause or tend to cause pollution of such waters according to the determination of the department...."

For more information

Environmental Chemical Solutions is currently located at 10421 Burnham Dr. N.W. Bldg. 2-B in Gig Harbor. They can be contacted by calling 853-5999.

However, many watchdog groups have taken it upon themselves to ensure enforcement, making the new chemical more valuable to potential customers.

"We are looking at the opportunity to get between businesses and regulators and make it a win-win situation," Grubbs said.

Current cleaning methods using FM 186 include sponging the resulting substance after the chemical has been added to a spill. The resulting substance can't be washed away.

According to Grubbs the law governing the pollution of waters is written in such a way that any action or inaction can get one into trouble.

"Cleaning up oil of sheens in parking lots, for example, can get you into trouble because nothing is allowed in storm water," Grubbs said. "We are trying to develop methods to fix this problem."

Grubbs' company is currently



Ed Grubbs, president of Environmental Chemical Solutions developed FM186, a chemical that neutralized the toxicity of petroleum products. Grubbs watches as Chuck Svac, supervisor of the Chevron Market Express, use FM186 to clean a small spill. The district manager, Mil Houser, uses FM186 in all eight Chevron stations he supervises.

Gateway photo/
Scott Turner

process for approval, but you have to prove you won't harm a certain flea larva, so it's very difficult to get approval," Grubbs said.

In the meantime, according to Grubbs, whenever a large petroleum spill occurs in water, no chemical can be added to the petroleum, even if the addition of that chemical will make the petroleum non-toxic.

Currently, Environmental Chemical Solutions has an annual income of about \$250,000. Their

income is expected to change dramatically within the next few months.

In prior months, the company was averaging nine to 17 new customers per month. The company added 26 new customers in December alone.

"We expect January to more than double that," Grubbs said.

They currently have offices in Gig Harbor, Sacramento and Portland. They hope to expand

their operations to a total of nine western states within the next couple of years.

Some of their customers are working on introducing the use of

FM 186 in their locations along the west coast and nationally. When this happens, the company projects their annual income to jump about \$4 million.