



LUI KIT WONG/THE NEWS TRIBUNE

Greg Parker, left, vice president of International Chemical Systems Inc., waits for Russell Tanner, president of Canterwood Co., to spray an oil spot with FM 186. Tanner says having the cleaner on hand is a 'no-brainer.'

A wonder cleaner?

Gig Harbor company hopes for a national market for its nontoxic oil cleaner

By **GRAHAM FYSH**
THE NEWS TRIBUNE

Norm LeMay considers FM 186 a miracle product.

"There is nothing else that is this clean or efficient to clean up oil leaks or spills," says the operational manager of Harold LeMay Enterprises, which provides garbage removal services in Pierce County.

As a result, cleanup kits containing FM

trucks, which occasionally spill oil from the hydraulic hoses and equipment used in waste collection and disposal. The product is also used in the company's shops and on its property.



Grubbs

He mixed, matched and mingled chemicals

FM 186 is the result of years of research by Gig Harbor's Ed Grubbs, who is president of International Chemical Systems, a provider of industrial water treatment chemicals.

INTERNATIONAL CHEMICAL SYSTEMS

President: Ed Grubbs.

Product: FM 186, which cleans up oil spills without harming the environment.

More information: 253-853-5999.

Cleaner

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until he came up with FM 186, which he says does such a good job of converting oil into a benign substance that people could swallow it without harmful effects.

He believes nothing like it exists and that it will revolutionize the way the world deals with oil spills.

Barbara Walz agrees. She uses FM 186 to clean oil off the top of the fuel dock at the Port of Poulsbo.

"The ecology people checked this out and told me it was safe to use," says Walz, who is port manager. After spraying the chemical onto the oil, the residue can be washed off into the water without any harmful effects to fish, she adds.

"I have tried many other products, believe me, and they either do not do a good job of cleaning, or they are harmful to the environment," says Walz, who uses about 5 gallons of FM 186 a year.

Locally, with an increasing emphasis on the quality of water being washed into the storm drain system and ultimately into Puget Sound, the use of such a clean-up product becomes even more critical, Grubbs says.

The detoxifying agent can be used to rinse floors in auto repair facilities, to wipe away spills at marine fuel docks and to clean areas where significant oil and grease buildup is a problem. It is made in the company's Gig Harbor manufacturing facility and a small plant in Roseville, Calif.

It took a couple of years to develop the product. Then, in 1997, Grubbs founded International Chemical Solutions along with chief operating officer Greg Parker and Gene Reierison.

They opened an office in July 1997 in Sacramento, headed by Reierison. Sales reps were appointed in Sacramento, Portland and the Puget Sound Region.

Last July, they raised \$250,000 from local business people to maintain operations and begin test-marketing the product last September.

Encouraged by the initial success, Grubbs is looking to raise another \$500,000, which will provide funding for two years and help take the product to the national market.

Already, the company has 100 customers ranging from large barge companies to fire departments. A major user is United Parcel Service, which uses it to clean up oil leaks from its trucks when they are parked overnight.

The next move will be to introduce the product to a larger area of the West Coast, from Northern California to Alaska. After that, Grubbs plans to open offices in Southern California, Phoenix and Salt Lake City, which, with the other offices, will enable the company to cover nine Western states, before going national.

Most other cleanup products are toxic to the environment, Grubbs explains. For example, when a road surface is cleaned by one of the leading products now used and the residue is washed off the road, it kills the grass at the side of the road.

But FM 186 is nontoxic and friendly to the environment, Grubbs says.

The chemical can be used to clean up all kinds of hydrocarbons and the residue is not a hazardous or dangerous waste, the company's business plan says.

"Under current environmental guidelines, the residue can be disposed of in the same manner as any other solid waste — it can be thrown away in the garbage."

Among those who use FM 186 is Russell Tanner, president of Canterwood Development at Gig Harbor. Tanner sprays it on oil patches left on the development's roads near speed bumps and on any type of oil-related environmental pollution left after houses have been built.

Tanner is confident that runoff from the development that eventually enters McCormick Creek and flows down to Puget Sound is as clean as possible.

The nearby golf course helps to clean the water, but ensuring it is clear before it enters the golf course is an added precaution, Tanner says.

"Although there is no legislation now requiring us to do this, we figure this is something we can show we have in our quiver with the Endangered Species Act coming down the road," Tanner says.

"We are not a major user, but we think that a lot of companies should have some of that handy just in case."

"To me, it seems to be a no-brainer."

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