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news@busjrn.com

Construction Update

Concrete waste service targeting the North Bay

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BY JEFF QUACKENBUSH
 STAFF REPORTER

NORTH BAY -- As construction projects large and small come under increased scrutiny as major sources of waterway pollution and landfill waste, a Folsom-based company is offering the North Bay a solution to one of the most vexing job-site waste streams: concrete.

American Concrete Washouts has expanded from Yuba, Placer, and Sutter counties to the North Bay via a newly established yard between Vacaville and Fairfield. From there, the company is delivering and servicing mobile cement washout catchbasins at sites in Solano, Napa, Marin, and Sonoma counties and the East Bay, according to Michael Liston, president and CEO.

The company aims to siphon business from conventional bale-and-pit or bag methods for collecting cement-laden water used to wash concrete mixer and pump trucks and equipment used for masonry and stucco. Instead, American Concrete Washouts offers portable metal bins that can accommodate up to 5.5 cubic yards of concrete solids or washout material from 38 mixers and two pumpers. Vehicles can back up to the sides of the bin or can be lifted above the bin via a built-in ramp.

For a \$350 charge plus \$7 daily for rentals of more than seven days, the company delivers a bin to the job site, vacuums water as it reaches the brim, and hauls away the bin when enough solids accumulate. The 12-foot-long-by-eight-foot-wide bins are designed and produced by its Elk Grove-based partner, Concrete Washout Systems. Planned product extensions are a 1.3-cubic-yard bin for small or weekend projects and a bin for paint and drywall contractors.

Driven by regulatory changes

Currently, industry and government best-management practices for concrete washout include designating an area for washouts and preventing overflows. For example, a California Stormwater Quality Association handbook suggests at least a three-foot-deep pit lined with 10-mil plastic and ringed with straw bales. Once the pit gets full, another is dug. In the original pit, the wastewater is left to evaporate, or it inadvertently leaks through tears in the plastic. Hardened concrete without embedded plastic, hay, or dirt is hauled to a construction waste recycling facility, and the rest goes to a landfill. The pit-and-bale method can cost \$800-\$1,200 in labor to dig, maintain, and clean up.

Conversely, American Concrete Washouts at its Solano County yard lowers the pH level of the cement washwater from an alkaloid 12.4 to standard levels, allows heavy metals to settle out, then offers treated wastewater to an adjacent aggregate plant for dust control. Concrete

solids -- though without the hay, dirt, and plastic waste -- are trucked to a recycler.

Regulatory changes have put more attention on on-site concrete washout facilities, among the first to be set up during a project and the last to be dismantled. This year, revisions to the federal Clean Water Act that extended stormwater pollution prevention requirements to projects of just one acre started being enforced, according to Will Bruhns, senior engineer of the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board. That board governs waterways that empty into the bay, such as the Napa and Petaluma river basins and portions of Marin County.

The penalty for a leaking concrete washout system, especially near a waterway, ranges from \$10,000/day to \$27,500/day plus \$10 a gallon of released wastewater. Regional water boards are working with local jurisdictions on training building inspectors to observe job sites for stormwater pollution issues, according to Mr. Bruhns.

The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, whose jurisdiction includes the Russian River basin, is focusing education and enforcement on large concrete plants as well as public works departments, according to senior engineer John Short. One of the two actions taken so far was against Shamrock Materials for an unlined earthen washout pit near a river in Cloverdale. Without the liner, wastewater was seeping into the soil. Mr. Short says the emphasis so far has been on education rather than punishment.

He spotted a bin....

Since starting operations in May, the four partners in American Concrete Washouts placed more than 100 bins in the northern interior area, amounting to \$1 million in revenues for this year. Mr. Liston projects that figure will double next year, when the company has three trucks servicing 100-200 bins in the North and East bay areas.

One of the first local customers is architectural concrete manufacturer Napa Valley Cast Stone. That company moved this summer from the former Basalt plant in south Napa because of the sale of the facility, according to manufacturing manager Tom Brown. Napa Valley Cast Stone had a concrete recycling system at its previous location but is making due with two bins from American Concrete Washouts for a month or more while work on its treatment and recycling system is completed.

The bin-and-service model isn't well known. Mr. Brown first spotted a bin while observing work on the Maxwell Bridge in Napa. Steve Dahl, project manager at Arthur & Devincenzi Concrete, wonders whether the service would work for his firm economically, but he acknowledged that it would cut labor costs and allow quicker transitions to new projects.

"At the end of a job, there are other places we want to put people, and it's a hassle to have to go back to job sites to pull up pits and bags then break up hardened concrete for recycling," he says. "Sometimes if there is a spill, we have to get a backhoe and dig up dirt."

Concrete contractors Mark Jenkins and Kevin Mickelson started Concrete Washout Systems in March 2003. Since then, they have amassed more than 200 clients via partnerships with distributor-operators such as American Concrete Washouts. The company has partners in Austin, Denver, and Southern California. In the next six months, partners will emerge in Reno and Las Vegas. Six interested parties are in Ohio, Iowa, and Rhode Island.

For more information, call 916-990-0842 or visit www.concretewashout.com.

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