Sorbents: No Need to Cry Over Spilled Oil, Wastewater, Acid, Freon... Anything!

Industrial spills pose major risks from a health and safety standpoint as well as from an environmental aspect. While everyone realizes the best way to avoid dealing with a spill is to prevent it, accidents do happen. Fortunately today there are revolutionary products, which when combined in some truly innovative programs, can remedy the spill and bring your plant back into the clean, safe work environment it is.

Program "fore" success!

Safety employees at a large commercial air conditioners company will be riding golf carts this summer - but not necessarily on the greens. The carts are part of the company's new Emergency Response System for cleaning up spills throughout the facility of this manufacturer of air conditioners. The facility is actually comprised of 4 plants, each within a ¼ mile of each other. Using golf carts to transport clean-up materials throughout the plants allows the safety team to move quickly and attend to spills immediately.

According to Pete Smith, safety technician and environmental specialist for air conditioner company, the new system gives them the mobility they need and allows them to carry more equipment. Before this, the manufacturer was using forklift trucks to transport equipment to the site of a spill. "The trucks were difficult to maneuver and couldn't carry all the equipment we needed," notes Smith. "We weren't able to respond as quickly as we wanted to. Getting there fast is critical!"

Smith worked with his Magid rep to put together a response system that includes a full array of clean-up equipment. The equipment is hauled in a large cart behind the golf cart. "Now we have the room to include drain covers and level B suits, sorbents, and even cones for cordonning off the spill area," Smith explains. "We have everything on the cart now to take care of any spill." According to Smith, Magid's breadth of experience came in handy. "Magid reps have seen everything," says Smith. "Because of this, they bring added value to our operation. They act as consultants, making sure we buy the right thing for our plant's needs."

For the air conditioner company, the "right thing" includes plenty of equipment to clean up many different types of spills. "Because of the nature of our work, we need to be prepared for many different types of spills," he explains. "It could be coolant from machinery, acid spills, water, freon-type products, or oils. Our response system has to include the sorbents and personal protective equipment to address all these situations. Now that we're on wheels, we are prepared for every kind of spill."

Personal and environmental safety: an attainable goal.

The environmental safety team at Closetmaid, a manufacturer of vinyl-coated shelving for custom and semi-custom closet installations, also must deal with many different types of spill situations. According to Greg Schmidbauer, manufacturing materials engineer and environmental coordinator, Closetmaid must contend with oil spills and wastewater spills as well as acids from cleaning materials.
"We keep sorbent pads under machines because the transformer oil can drip on the floor," says Schmidbauer. "We don't want that oil getting anywhere else. Not only is it slippery, but it could get into floor cracks and seep into the ground. Also, we don't want pools of oil collecting under our machines. We pride ourselves on maintaining a very clean plant."

Schmidbauer says Closetmaid is a heavy sorbent user, purchasing numerous cases of sorbent pads each month. Since there is such heavy usage, cost plays a major factor in a purchasing decision. "However," Schmidbauer adds, "we're simply not willing to sacrifice performance and safety for a better price." When Closetmaid did a cost comparison, they revealed that Magid's prices were lower than those of the company's former supplier. "Once we saw a better price, we did a side-by side comparison of Magid's 3M sorbent and our old product," says Schmidbauer. "We got equal performance and actually achieved better compaction with Magid's lower-priced sorbent. Then, we checked the BTUs to make sure the waste profile was the same for both products. Once we saw they were the same, we switched to Magid's product and are saving $XXX per year."

The industrial spill motto: be prepared.
Both Trane and Closetmaid know that when it comes to spills, you have to be prepared for anything. For example, at Closetmaid a 3000 gallon processed water tank ruptured and flooded the floor. The environmental team responded quickly. They used sorbent socks or booms at the doors of the plant to contain the spill and prevent it from releasing.

As part of its well orchestrated prevention program, Trane has implemented a new Emergency Response Cart, as well as put cell phones and two sets of crews to work. "We can call the crews together immediately after a spill is reported," says Trane's Smith. "The first crew is charged with creating a dike. They use drain covers, sorbents, and other tools to keep the spill from spreading. The second crew follows up with the suction equipment to do the clean up."

In a perfect world there would be no spills, drips, or ruptures. But until that world exists, these savvy companies combine improved product technology with safety preparedness to respond quickly and effectively to contain, control and clean up plant spill.