

Construction Sweeping: Safely and Efficiently

In this article he did for Better Roads magazine, WorldSweeper.com's editor discusses the many factors to consider when hiring a construction sweeping contractor.



In many parts of the country, environmental considerations have in recent years become the top reason for sweeping construction sites. The United States Environmental Protection Agency cites dirt track-out by vehicles from construction sites as one of the leading causes of pollution. This is considered a serious problem because track-out transports sediment and/or polluted material to places where it can easily be washed into water bodies, violating the Clean Water Act. Typically, sweeping is the best way to achieve the results required under the Act.

Equipment needed

EPA rules don't specify any particular techniques or machinery. Rather, the EPA's regulatory requirements dictate only that comprehensive pollution-prevention plans are in place for construction projects. Whatever structural and housekeeping efforts the plans call for must be implemented to have a positive impact.

Many individual states now have far more strict construction site regulations than those on the national level. The number of companies that offer quick-response and heavy-duty sweeping for the construction industry is relatively small. If you specify sweeping services for construction cleanup, make sure you hire a contractor that has construction sweeping experience, as well as the type of heavy-duty sweepers needed.

In most cases, these will be mechanical broom machines. That's because the transverse-broom action is needed to remove packed-down dirt and debris created on a construction site. In lighter debris situations, an air sweeper may be able to handle the job. If so, you can expect to pick up a larger proportion of the fine material, where a much higher portion of the total pollutants is contained.

Good contractors needed

In construction sweeping, any missed areas will be noticed. Use a seasoned sweeper operator on any construction work -- someone capable of achieving superb results under the most demanding conditions. Especially with road milling, the sweeper's job changes hour-to-hour, and each jobsite location can pose a wide variety of new challenges.

Karl Stauty is president of Virginia-based Commercial Power Sweeping. His company was the first in Virginia to become a Certified Contractor through the North American Power Sweeping Association. The firm has been construction sweeping for about 15 years.

“Until recently, sweeping services required a hard sell to residential developments,” Stauty says. “Now, these companies have become extremely concerned about complying with Phase II of the Clean Water Act because they know the statutes are being stringently enforced and don’t want to be shut down, since that can be very expensive.

“In Virginia Beach, for example, a contractor developed a site and then sold individual lots to a number of builders who thought it wasn’t their responsibility to keep the access roads cleaned. The city’s response was to just quit doing inspections, which got everyone’s attention. Almost overnight the individual contractors got together and started a fund that paid for the level of sweeping needed.

“Because we’re near Chesapeake Bay, runoff pollution eventually makes it into the water. The closer any project is to the water, the more stringent the inspectors become, even if there are retention ponds or other remediation.



And, we’re not just sweeping ingress/egress roads now. An increased emphasis is being placed on keeping the internal areas of construction sites swept, too.

“Most sweeping is still done with mechanical broom machines, and typical frequency is high enough that they do a good job. Although air-based

sweepers are better for handling the small-micron material that creates dust, they can’t handle packed-down mud and many of the larger items that are a natural byproduct of construction waste. When there’s been a long dry spell, though, air sweepers are sometimes a better choice, since trying to sweep the dried-out material with a mechanical broom sweeper creates an increased level of dust.

“One of the changes we’ve seen in Virginia is contractors building small, lined detention ponds to contain vehicle wash-off debris, especially from concrete trucks. At the end of the project, the pond is emptied of polluted debris before being filled. That makes our job easier, since trucks used to be washed off all over a jobsite. There’s also a \$500 fine for crossing a silt fence at an unapproved spot, so the debris now tends to be more centralized.”

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