Industrial cleaning made easy

Ian Ross. **Northern Ontario Business**. Sudbury: Aug 01, 2001.Vol.21, Iss. 10; pg. 7

Full Text (714 words)

"Show me your worst nightmare."

That is what Ray Sasseville of Environmentally Tested Clean Inc. (ETC), tells potential clients when extolling the virtues of **dry-ice cleaning**.

The general manager of the nine-month-old, Sudbury company offering this service believes they have "barely scratched the surface" in fully realizing the potential of this technique to tackle any tough industrial cleaning job.

The seven-employee company, which also maintains a satellite office in Timmins, has been making converts out of disbelievers in an area stretching across Northern Ontario and into western Quebec.

Ordinarily, heavy machinery, electrical components and control panels in a mine or paper mill, encrusted with dust, dirt and all manner of crud would likely never undergo a thorough scrubbing. Since cleansers and water do not mix well with sensitive circuitry, eventually machines and parts would just clog up with filth, break down and be junked.

And using abrasive blasting techniques with industrial sand, soda or beads on such delicate surfaces is unthinkable.

Sasseville says ETC's dry-ice method delivers more of a "gentle touch" in deep cleaning even the most hard-to-reach surfaces.

Also known as CO2 or cryogenic blasting, the dry-ice technique sprays on particles of solid carbon dioxide that lift dirt and contaminants off a surface instead of chiselling away like an ice pick with other conventional forms of cleaning.

Coming in the form of nuggets, pellets or pencil tip-sized particles, dry ice gets deep into the nooks and crannies of a surface where it instantly reverts into a gas, expanding 400 times its size to remove grit from the inside out.

The beauty of it is that machinery, wiring, zinc molds, practically anything can be cleaned in half the time it takes other forms of cleaning, resulting in less downtime, says Sasseville. And it is environmentally safe, needing no solvent additives and creating no waste.

Sasseville, who runs a training consulting business, became hooked on the technology when his son, Troy, was working for a Toronto company offering **dry-ice cleaning** in the Sudbury area.

Though the company didn't last long, Sasseville came away impressed with the process and knew it had potential if they marketed it properly and developed the contacts.

Together with his son and another partner, Ron Stevens, they formed ETC in December and have been slowly gaining momentum to build up a client list across Northern Ontario and into western Quebec.

"People are used to doing things the same way they've been doing it for the past 20 years," Sasseville says. "Once we demonstrate it and show what's left over, it's almost a shock to them."

The dry ice technique has its roots in the aircraft industry, dating back to the 1970s when Lockheed engineers developed this method for cleaning aircraft instead of using harsh solvents.

The drawbacks of the early technology were that it wasn't transportable and the equipment costs were too high for most end users to give up using other processes.

It was Alpheus Cleaning Technologies, a California company, who bought the patent and introduced a specialty line of compact equipment that could easily be hauled onto a customer shop floor where electrical components, switches and computer panels can be cleaned in place. Nothing has to be disassembled and shipped elsewhere.

ETC bought the technology from Alpheus - a CO2 MiniBlasat unit - and now specializes in cleaning electrical components. "And we do it without damaging the equipment or leaving moisture behind," says Sasseville.

Cleaning of electrical components was "unheard of" unless chemicals were used, which left behind a hazardous material of the blasting consumables combined with dirt and contaminants.

Though many of the businesses they approached were skeptical at first, some of their regular customers now include Inco Ltd., Falconbridge Ltd., Grant Forest Products, the City of Greater Sudbury, Sudbury Star, Timmins Daily Press and Panolamb Industries in Huntsville.

Their work in cleaning 50-tonne electric ore cars at Inco so amazed the Swedish manufacturer, GIA industri AB, makers of Kiruna electric trolleys, that ETC has opened up an overseas dialogue to possibly lease their equipment and train their personnel.

For now, Sasseville says the company's immediate plans are to consolidate their customer base in Northern Ontario, particularly in the northeastern region, but he wouldn't mind making some inroads into the aircraft industry from which the technology originated.