

# Cloverdale manufacturer sees a bigger bottom line by using well planned environmental practices and policies

BY CAMERON "SCOTT" KIRK

Environmental regulations and regulators are permanent facets of commerce today. Like basic production and supply concerns, environmental issues now demand continual attention in nearly every business.

In recognizing the importance of these matters, businesses, along with regulatory agencies, are beginning to recognize how pollution prevention policies within the workplace benefit business. Aggressive management of hazardous wastes is certain to reduce the risk of liability for contamination. Moreover, it is increasingly evident that cost efficiency, production levels, and profit margins may be increased by handling environmental issues through well considered company policy and practice.

Examples are now more common of how aggressive planning and action in these regards may enhance the bottom line while meeting or exceeding regulatory requirements.

## Recycling solid waste

One good example is Reuser, Inc., a landscape supply business operating out of Cloverdale. Reuser has been selling bark chips, soil amendments, and other wood by-products throughout northern California for more than 15 years. During the last few years, however, Reuser has revised its suppliers, instituted new product lines, and modified major portions of its operations

in response to environmental issues.

First, Reuser has seen the value inherent in recycling efforts taking place throughout northern California. Whereas Reuser used to *purchase* all of its wood scrap supplies from lumber mills, Reuser is now *paid* to collect tons of recyclable material every day from sites throughout northern California. This recyclable material accounts for as much as 35 tons per day of recyclable product.

The recycled material comes primarily from local landfills and lumber processing facilities, as well as grape stem refuse from local grape harvests. This former waste is used to produce such nontraditional products as fuel for co-generation power plants and bio-medium filters for the Santa Rosa sewage treatment plant.

## Recycling water

Situated on a 15-acre site, Reuser's operations have historically used up to 12,000 gallons of water a day. Heavy machinery is used, maintained, and serviced on-site, as hundreds of tons of supply and/or product are moved every day. Accordingly, with potential mingling of water and hazardous wastes, water contamination has been and remains a major concern.

To address this problem, Reuser has taken significant steps over the last five years to recycle water, keep potentially contaminated water off bare ground, and reduce water use. Water runoff is now managed and directed throughout the site by

drains, berms, and concrete pads. As a result, last winter, when other businesses were mired in mud, Reuser lost no time due to the heavy rains.

The benefit of this water management program has proved so successful that Reuser is presently completing further improvements to its water system. These will include additional concrete pads, berms, and retaining walls; separate drains for contaminated and uncontaminated water; and its own water treatment plant and holding pond.

With these improvements in place, Reuser anticipates that within three years, its water will be fully recyclable, nearly eliminating its water costs.

## Other benefits

These practices also prevent hazardous waste from contaminating Reuser's property and products. Consequently, significantly less time is required on quality control and hazardous waste management. Local regulators are also less concerned with Reuser's operations involving hazardous waste and so spend less time testing and regulating site operations. Time that Reuser would otherwise spend on those regulatory matters can now be spent on production matters, increasing Reuser's efficiency, productivity, and profit.

The example provided by Reuser demonstrates that all areas of production—from supply through final product—may be

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enhanced by an aggressive and practical consideration of today's environmental factors. Other benefits include the ability to obtain a cooperative working relationship with governmental agencies, thereby saving time, money, and aggravation. Worker health and safety is also impacted by properly enacted environmental policies, which in turn positively affects worker efficiency and productivity.

The greatest cost savings may be in the time and money not spent on contamination issues. Well planned environmental policies and practices enable a business to effectively address hazardous waste issues before contamination and all of its costly manifestations occur.

## Summary

Experience is beginning to demonstrate clearly that the commitment necessary to promulgate and implement environmental policies brings returns. Viewed as an investment, sound environmental planning becomes an asset, not a liability.

As environmental issues impact on supply and product lines, as well as operations and marketing, smart businesses will take advantage of planning and foresight to turn hazardous waste concerns into economic advantages.

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