

A Step Toward Better Utility Maintenance



When the Ohio division of American Electric Power implemented contract mixing nearly a decade ago, the utility was simply trying to improve its right-of-way management program.

“At the time, an array of environmental concerns were facing America and the public highly scrutinized large corporations,” says Gary O’Neil, system forester for AEP. “We wanted to take steps to maintain our rights-of-way in a manner that focused on environmental stewardship, while at the same time, protecting the bottom line. Contract mixing managed to meet both of these needs.”



Once buying into contract mixing, O’Neil began receiving herbicide concentrates and premixed solutions in returnable, refillable containers. This alleviated the trouble of disposing used herbicide jugs, and detoured containers from landfills.

“To put it in perspective, we manage 186,000 distribution and 33,000 transmission line miles,” O’Neil relates. “Since adopting the returnable, refillable program, we have prevented the disposal of enough herbicide containers to fill two football fields.”

Not surprisingly, AEP now orders 90 percent of its herbicides from Dow AgroSciences in the Continuum™ Prescription Control and Container Management System through Aquimix Inc. O’Neil purchases concentrates of

Garlon® 3A herbicide and Tordon® K herbicide. For basal applications, AEP requests mixtures of 20 percent Garlon 4 and 5 percent Tordon K with basal oil.

“While we receive products that provide excellent control of unwanted vegetation, the Continuum system really pays off by providing accurate mixes just in time for application,” O’Neil explains. “We spend less time conducting preparation and cleanup activities, and more time spraying brush.”

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requires used herbicide containers to be triple rinsed, cut into pieces and specially bagged before disposal. By the time they finish, workers have handled each container at least three times. In five years, just one returnable, refillable container can save \$365 in container disposal fees, compared to a normal drum.

“The returnable, refillable containers require no cleanup measures, and their closed-loop application systems decrease the chance for worker exposure,” says Dave Schoonover, president of Aquimix Inc. “Not to mention, end users no longer store empty containers on their property, because

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we immediately retrieve drums and refill them accordingly.”

Before AEP receives its shipments, permanent bar codes are affixed to drums for tracking. The bar code numbers, container contents and destinations are logged into an electronic database.

“We can identify the specific batch number of registered products used from manufacturers, type of mix and amount of product, as well as many other variables, from the time the container leaves the facility to when it returns,” Schoonover explains. “This tracking system gives AEP higher product accountability standards and decreases leftover and wasted herbicides, thus saving the utility money.”

The method also gives AEP vegetation management crews increased credibility. With returnable, refillable containers and closed-loop application, onlookers never see crews mixing or pouring herbicides into tanks. Since AEP workers are constantly in the public eye, portraying this positive land stewardship image reduces the chance for complaints.

“From a public image standpoint, the Continuum system is one of our wiser investments,” O’Neil says. “While the technology may not be able to dismiss all of the challenges our industry faces, it is certainly a step toward economical, environmentally sound right-of-way maintenance.” **WISER**

