

toxicity turned environmentalism

Behind the scenes of hazardous waste with RDW Environmental's Bob Woodard



Woodard

Before it was the law, before it became trendy, Bob Woodard was an environmentalist.

As a pressman back in the '70s, Woodard wore gloves and a respirator before the Occupational Safety

and Health Administration required it, even before OSHA was looking at toxic chemicals.

In the '80s, he would be tasked with overseeing the property evaluation and cleanup of multiple septic fields where pressroom chemicals had been randomly poured down the drain for three decades from an in-plant printer in Miami — a job he laughingly calls a “valuable learning experience.”

Today the man behind RDW Environmental Inc. has stayed at the crest of the “green” wave, doing research and going back to school when needed, and partnering with companies such as Island Clean Air to sell mobile air-scrubbing equipment and Photographic Waste Control to manage hazardous waste.

His expertise in the field has even caught the attention of the United Nations. The UN, during the renovation of its complex in Manhattan, was determined to avoid

the problems of rescue workers after 9/11, who fell ill after breathing in the noxious fumes of broken, aged buildings. In six weeks' time, RDW Environmental had sold 18 Island Clean Air systems to the UN.

Though traditional printers have always been his mainstay, he also sells air-filtration machines to schools, prisons, funeral homes, building and aircraft restorers, the automotive industry, and even the U.S. Senate.

In the U.S. Senate Dirksen building, located behind the U.S. Capitol, there is a VDP print center and wide format solvent printers. Now they are using four of RDW Environmental's largest air-scrubbing systems to rid the air of fumes and dust down to 0.3-micron particles (a 20-micron particle is invisible to the human eye).

Neither the VOCs (volatile air compounds) in pressroom solvents nor the ubiquitous corn starch in anti-offset spray powder that coats everything in a fine white dust, escape from the ICA air-scrubbing systems.

Working closely with both printers and regulators, Woodard is in a unique position to understand both the needs of industry and environment, of workers and management.

Graphics of the Americas 2010 marks the fourth year of RDW Environmental Inc./ Photographic Waste Control handling the hazardous waste generated by exhibitors — supplying the containers before the show, and collecting them afterward.

Printers ink, blanket washes, solvents, refrigerant, activator stabilizer — Woodard takes care of anything and everything that printers throw his way.

Prepress chemicals may have a pH of 13

or 14, incredibly alkaline chemicals so caustic their vapors could burn the eyes, skin or mucous membranes.

Tragedies can and do occur when printers dismiss hazardous-waste removal or safety regulations as unnecessary expenses.

Chemicals improperly disposed of in one company's Dumpster came to light when two children crawled inside and died from inhaling the fumes.

At another company, 12 workers burned their nasal passages, throats, and lungs and landed in the hospital from breathing in anhydrous ammonia, sometimes used as the developing agent for microfilm, when the machines became over-pressurized and the room filled with gas.

“That's like taking a bottle of Clorox to your nose and inhaling it full strength,” he said. “There were news trucks, EMT and fire trucks, helicopters... anytime

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