

# Water Regulations' Effect on Car Washes

## Strict Water Preservation in Drought Areas Influencing the Industry

While some states are dealing with extensive rainfall and flooding, droughts have made water conservation a priority for car wash businesses in other parts of the country. With an estimated 75,000 car washes in North America employing about 625,000 people, according to the International Car Wash Association, and consumers spending more than \$22.2 billion annually to have their vehicles professionally cleaned, car wash businesses play an important part in the water industry.

Recently, *Water Quality Products* spoke with John F. X. Bennett, president of Sun Country Car Wash Systems, Inc., a vehicle wash equipment distributor in El Paso, Texas, that provides services in the southwest region of West Texas, New Mexico and Arizona to find out just how water and water preservation issues affect car wash businesses.

### Water Preservation

"Five years ago water wasn't an issue," Bennett said. "Now water has become as tight a commodity as oil in this part of the country."

According to Bennett, a year ago the city of El Paso enacted an ordinance that any car wash using more than 50 gallons per car would require a reclaimed system to be able to open.

"Car washing was looked at closely by the city because it is the first thing that comes up as a big water user," Bennett explained. "We are in the middle of the desert and we are out of water, so the city did a study, and I think all the car washes combined use up a quarter of the daily water used in El Paso." Because of this, Sun Country has taken steps in the last five years to work with customers to put in underground tanks so they can reclaim used water.

Bennett thinks that it is very important to stop overlooking water. Car washes in particular should take advantage and look into recycle/reclaimed systems. Within the last year, this technology has evolved and it is something businesses in drought-stricken areas really need to consider, he said.

In addition, he recommends that car wash businesses look at the town's water and sewer rates. Although towns may not require a water reclaim system, car washes might want to consider installing one just to cut down on water and sewer bills. "Most towns are pricing their water and sewer bills on 'the more you use, the more you pay' basis," Bennett explained. "I have some people that have hit \$2,500 per month, and that would pay for a recycle system in a short period of time."

### Regulations

When asked what sets him apart from his competitors, Bennett responded, "What keeps us above is learning the regulations and informing our customers of the changes and working with them so when the day comes, they don't have a million-dollar investment that they have to close and walk away and still make payments on."

Bennett currently is building his own car wash business, which really helps with understanding the needs of his customers. "The problems and issues we're having are not just with water. There is an environmental studying of the property being done; we have to talk to the Texas Highway Department to get curb cuts, and the bureaucracy there has been pretty tough," he explained.

Bennett applies his clear understanding of the car wash business's needs to Sun Country's business model.

"We don't just go and sell people car wash



Installing water reclamation systems can help car washes conserve water and save money on their water and sewer bills.

systems," Bennett explained. "Once we get the opportunity to talk to the customer we inform them of what are the ADA laws on car washes. And it's not just city as much as it is state and federal regulations."

ADA currently requires that every car wash business has 19-foot-wide bays, enough for a wheelchair to get around the vehicle. Additionally, the coin acceptors can't be higher than 48 inches, Bennett said. And the city is monitoring a lot more closely as far as what's being dumped in the sewage system, he added.

### Maintenance and Customer Service

Apart from keeping up with city regulations and technology updates, Sun Country also focuses on customer service.

"Our biggest thing has been follow up and knowing our business," Bennett said. "Knowing what the regulations are, knowing our equipment, knowing what it can do and explaining to the customer that this is not something they can build and walk away from and collect money on every week."

Sun Country provides its customers with complete service, parts and repair. "And we travel as far as 500 miles from our home office," he added. But most of all, "I've been in this industry so long I enjoy it. I think it is fun getting out and meeting people and helping them with some of their daily problems."

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