

Equipment Gives Students an Environmental Lesson

An environmental lesson that students at Mahomet-Seymour High School (MSHS) are learning should reap benefits for years to come.

The Illinois Waste Management and Research Center (WMRC) has developed a water based parts washer called the "Grease Gator" in its Champaign labs. MSHS shop classes are using the "Grease Gator" to clean parts in its shop classes. Use of the parts washer is being donated by Solvent Systems, Inc. of Lake Bluff, IL.



Sean Bruce, a sophomore at MSHS, is one of the students who enjoyed using the water based parts washer developed by the Waste Management & Research Center and now being used in the school.

The "Grease Gator" is more efficient and environmentally friendly than the washer that it replaced. The chemicals in the old washer irritated student's skin, and the washer produced an irritating smell as well, according to Lndi Kocher, Agriculture Instructor at MSHS. She teaches a variety of shop classes including power mechanics, mechanization, and Ag Business operations.

Kocher said the students have been impressed with how well the new washer works. And it has let students see that there are environmentally friendly ways to do a job. The "Grease Gator" is equipped with a special separator device that diverts the oil that is cleaned off the parts into a collection reservoir. The collected oil is easily removed and taken to a local farmer who uses it for heating purposes.

The teacher said that MSHS students will take this knowledge to their future jobs and will help those businesses find ways to prevent pollution and recycle materials. This can only help Illinois companies and the environment in future years.

"The students have been impressed with how well the new washer works. And it has let students see that there are environmentally friendly ways to do a job", said Linda Kocher, Agriculture Instructor at MSHS.

This future benefit is what Solvent Systems had in mind when it donated the parts washer, according to Steve Rundell, company president. He said sometimes industry is slow to implement change as major as this new parts washing system.

"Our approach was to give it to the next generation and

show them how well it works," said Rundell.

Kocher said the "Grease Gator" has had the added benefit of getting students involved in good discussions of the environment. Students have been thinking about where waste products go after they are used.

"Students have made the comment that it never even crossed their minds about how chemicals are disposed of," Kocher said. "It has been a very good learning experience for students."

She said it has lead students into other efforts to recycle products at the school.

Some 70 students used the parts washer in shop classes this past school year. There are more than 800 students at MSHS. Kocher is convinced that the new washer also will save money for the school because it operates more efficiently and does not have to be pumped out and refilled the way the old system did. The new washer also is on a timer so it only operates during the hours when students would need it.

"These students will be among those who will show the immense potential of this system in management of chemicals," said Steve Rundell, President of Solvent Systems International. "It has stopped the use of certain hazardous chemicals."

Rundell said once students or businesses get to use the parts washer developed by WMRC and Solvent Systems they are impressed. He said the company has been letting industry use the system on a four-week trial basis. He said the response after using it has been tremendous and Solvent Systems now has orders for the system from several major corporations and the government.

"These students will be among those who will show the immense potential of this system in management of chemicals," said Rundell. "It has stopped the use of certain hazardous chemicals in the process of cleaning parts."

WMRC is a division of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Its headquarters is on the campus of the University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign.

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