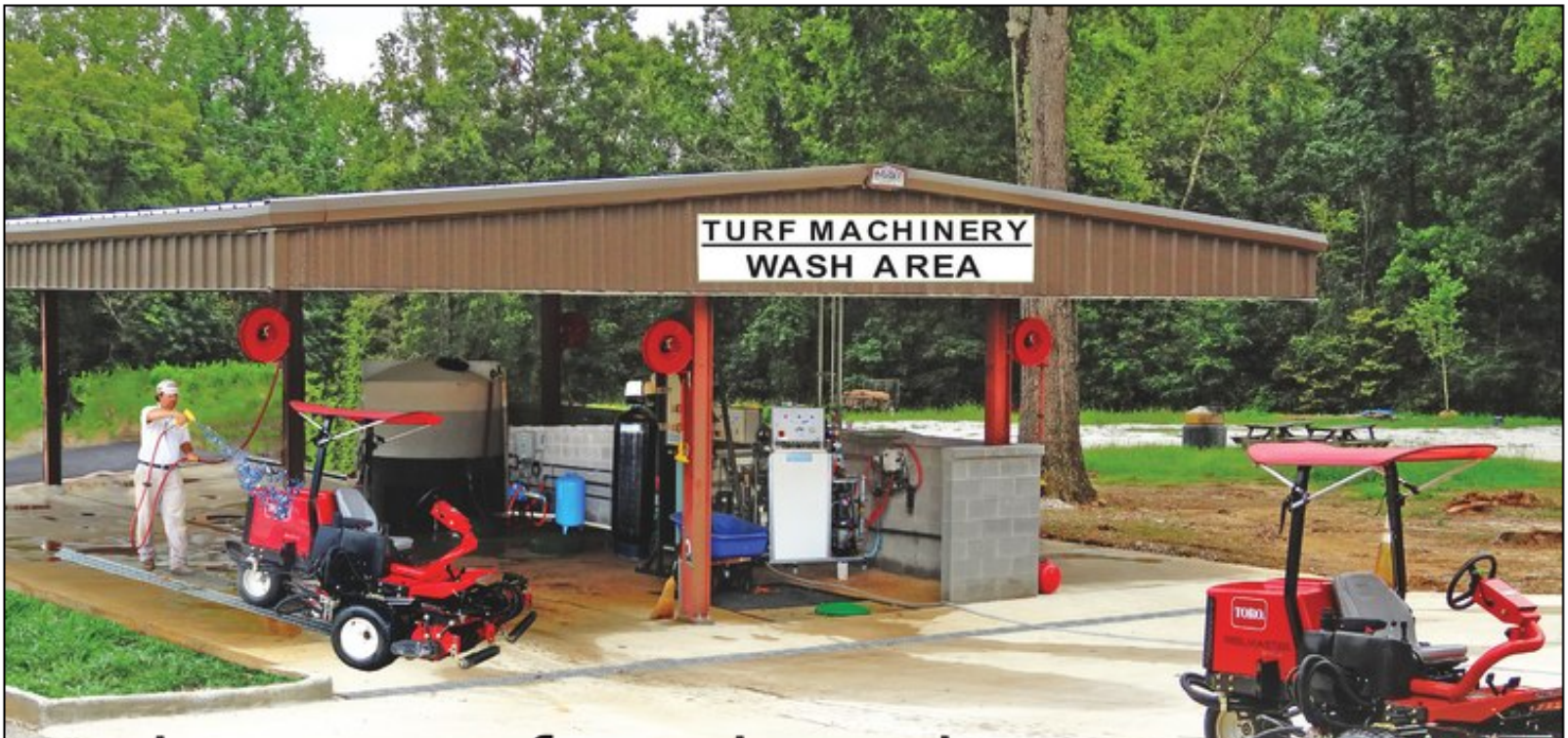


The Case for Closed-Loop Wash Stations

High-tech systems can do golf courses a lot of good. But are they in the budget?

BY ANTHONY PIOPPI / SENIOR WRITER

There are no hard facts, but the guess is that only between 1,000 and 1,500 golf facilities throughout the country have closed-loop wash stations installed at their maintenance facilities.

But that number is surely increasing. Across the U.S., almost every course that opens or new maintenance facility that is built must construct a wash station to meet permitting requirements. For those facilities seeking to obtain Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Status, a wash station is almost always required.

These are high-tech wash stations, closed-loop with diked-off areas so nothing — from pesticides to engine oil to grass clippings and beyond — escapes.

With most of these units, microscopic organisms break down the pollutants, cleansing the water so it can be used repeatedly. Costs run between $25,000 and $30,000 for the entire system, not including construction of the wash pads.

With regulating bodies on the local, state and national levels focusing on pollution of the aquifer, many facilities are installing wash stations even though they're not yet required to.

States such as New Jersey are "cracking down," according to Austin Shepherd, vice president and technical director of Bridgeport, Conn.-based Carbtrol Corp., manufacturer of equipment for pollution control and wastewater treatment. They are especially looking to halt "washing equipment into a drain or into a stream that gets carried off-site."

Carbtrol's wash stations, according to Shepherd, "use activated carbon in combination with advanced oxidation" to break down pollutants.

There could be problems even on courses where polluted water does not run off-site.

"Some wash in the rough. That may or may not be a problem," Shepherd says. "You wash off a little chemical over a long period of time and you can be potentially creating a groundwater contamination problem."

Another draw for wash stations is how much water they can save a facility.

David Mears is director at Highspeed Group Ltd., headquartered in England, which produces ClearWater water recycling systems. Mears says that one National Trust Property, a house that has a two wash hose ClearWater system equipped with water meters, saved 250,000 liters (66,043 gallons) in a year. ClearWater entered the American golf market in 2011.

"If he hasn't got a wash station, he's not washing effectively," Mears says. "He's wasting thousands of gallons, and water's not free anymore, is it?"

According to Mears, courses in Great Britain are purchasing wash stations because of possible litigation, which could soon be a reality in the U.S.

"If they keep polluting the groundwater,

continued on page 40

PHOTO: COURTESY OF FREYLIT USA

Wash Stations

continued from page 38

they are going to be prosecuted," Mears said of the UK. "Legislation is driving our business."

According to Mears, his company's product is different from others because its wash station unit is installed safely below ground. He explains that by doing so the biologicals live in a more stable environment since the temperature of the water does not fluctuate as much as aboveground units.

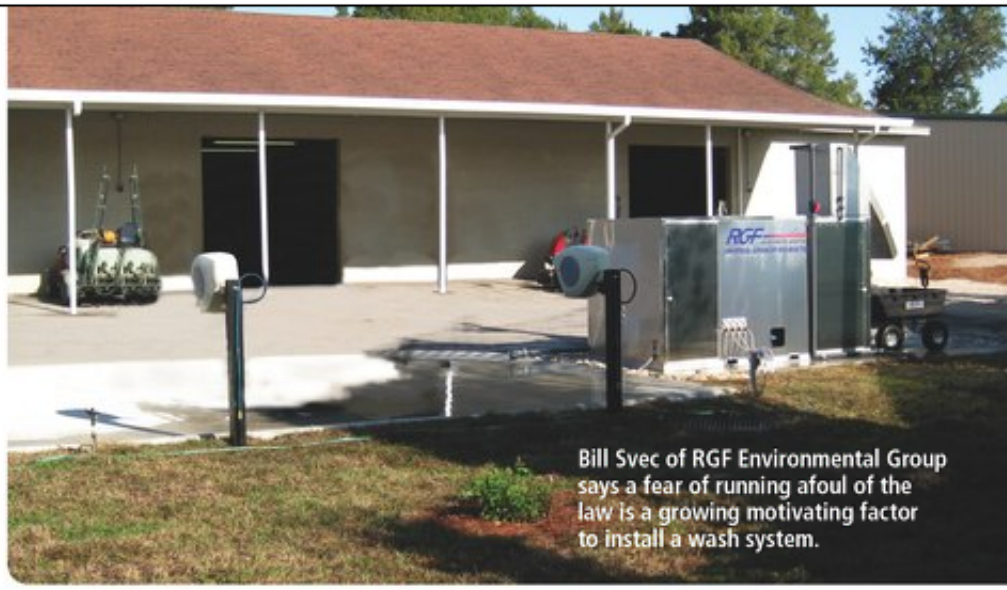


PHOTO: COURTESY OF RGF ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP

Bill Svec of RGF Environmental Group says a fear of running afoul of the law is a growing motivating factor to install a wash system.

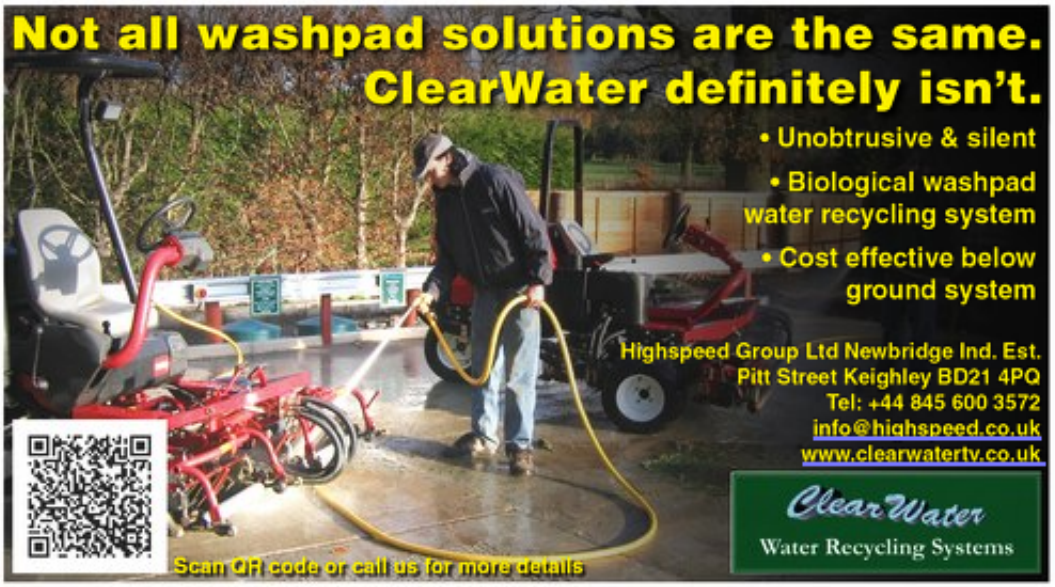
The U.S. market

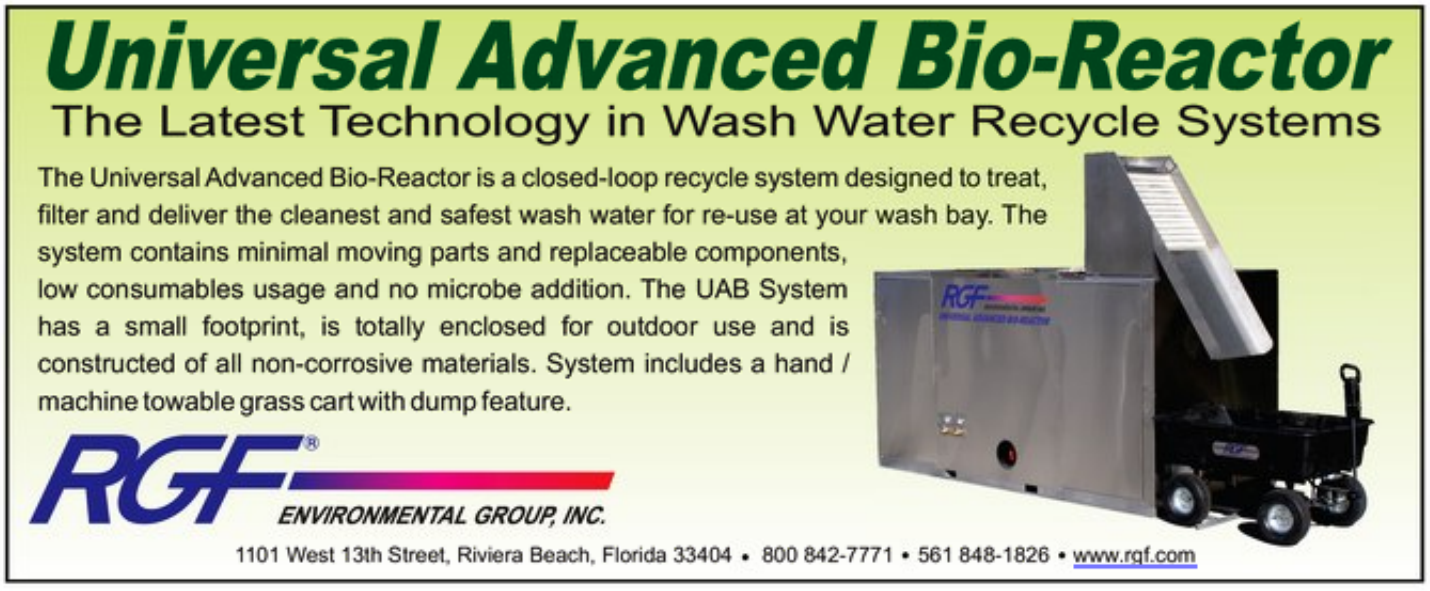
Freylit USA, an affiliate of Freylit based in Austria, is the newest company to enter the U.S. golf wash station market. The company produces an array of water treatment systems, from units designed to clean up massive oil spills in the open ocean to others used for washing busses. Freylit's first U.S. golf course washing system was installed at Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte, N.C., near the Freylit USA headquarters.

Neil Dick, vice president of Freylit USA, says the company's wash station differs from others in a number of significant ways. First, ozone isn't used in the purification process. While effective, Dick says ozone is not an environmentally friendly way to degerm water and erodes rubber materials if the circulation and ozone concentration is not carefully set and monitored.

"Ten years ago we developed our own system to kill germs," Dick says. In part, that involves a proprietary method of making the water "want more oxygen." Increased oxygen levels kill anaerobic germs, he explains.

Freylit's wash system also sends a high-voltage, low-amp electrical current through the water to





cluster the dirt, which makes removal from the water easier, as well as killing algae.

Bill Svec, industrial sales manager for RGF Environmental Group in West Palm Beach, Fla., says a fear of running afoul of the law is a growing motivating factor to install wash systems in the U.S. Depending on the "extent of pollution, there could be criminal prosecution," he says.

"What I have seen, if it does happen, it is very localized," Svec continues. "There has always been legislation in place, but there is no enforcement."

According to Svec, in many instances golf courses installing wash stations on their own have found it strikes the right note with government officials who police such areas as water quality. In some cases, Svec says that once an official sees a wash station, he doesn't go looking for violations.

According to Svec, RGF was the first company to design, develop and patent a closed-loop wastewater recycling system. RGF was also the first company to enter the golf market with that type of wash unit, Svec says.

Even though only a small percentage of courses have high-tech wash stations, many superintendents who aren't using them are familiar with what they do.

"I have to explain to a lot of people [outside the golf industry] what a [wash station] is," says Aaron Auger, water treatment division manager for Mi-T-M Corp., based in Peosta Iowa. "Superintendents know what it is."

Getting a superintendent to purchase one, though, often takes time.

According to Svec, superintendents stop by his company's booth at the Golf Industry Show to hear what he has to say. Most times, he says, the response, is, " 'Yeah great,' and they walk away." They tell him, "I know we need it, but it's not in the budget."

That doesn't mean that superintendents will never purchase wash stations. Such sales may just take some time. Auger agrees, noting that oftentimes the superintendent understands the need, but those with the power of the purse don't.

Auger says it can be up to four years from the time he first makes contact with a golf course to when that golf course purchases a unit.

"It's always something that comes back onto the table. They realize it's something they should have," Auger says.

According to Svec, "liability or enforcement are the two motivating factors" in golf courses buying a wash station.

There is one other reason, Auger adds.

"Superintendents don't want to be the person on the front page of the paper that killed all the fish," he says. "They are motivated by negative publicity."

By now, superintendents understand that being an environmentally friendly golf course is a requirement and not a fad.

"The green initiative is not going away," Auger says. "The word recycling is not going away."

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