

HAZMAT



David Daniels investigates abandoned waste on a MTA rail right-of-way.



Marion Ray, left, checks hazardous waste drums at RRC.



Moni Rubisa supervises cleaning of steam rack oil and water separator.

MTA Team Focuses on Cleanup, Disposal, Environmental Compliance

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(March 15) Mid-morning, June 2, 1999. A Metro Blue Line train eastbound on Washington Boulevard rams an 18-wheeler attempting an illegal turn onto Hill Street.

Diesel fuel pours from the truck's ruptured tank. Leaking into a nearby storm drain, it runs into Ballona Creek. The spill must be stopped before it reaches the ocean.

Within the hour following the accident, MTA Environmental Compliance officers Jim Jimenez, Marion Ray and David Daniels are on-scene directing the cleanup. Also responding are city Public Works Department and county HAZMAT officials and the U.S. Coast Guard.

The MTA team oversees a contractor whose workers clean and flush the storm drain. A 5,000-gallon tanker truck vacuums up the waste water. Workers also set up absorbent booms in Ballona Creek to catch any fuel that might escape the vacuum truck.

No contaminants reach the ocean.

Trained and equipped for the job

Not an ordinary day for the members of the Quality Assurance Department's Environmental Compliance Section, but one they were trained and equipped to handle, says section head Jim Jimenez.

"It's mayhem, sometimes," says Jimenez, noting that members of the team are on 24-hour call, "but we try to respond as fast as we can to contain a release."

The five-member Environmental Compliance Section spends 85 to 90 percent of its time doing preventive work. Team member Gerry Alvarez inspects all 20 MTA operating facilities each month. He, along with Victor Laury and Moni Rubisa, advises managers on waste disposal and keeps them abreast of constantly changing environmental regulations.

The team ensures that the MTA recycles or properly disposes of almost 2 million gallons of waste oil, fluids and chemicals it generates annually. They maintain a 60- to 70-day schedule for hazardous waste removal.

Tons of waste materials, recycling

The team oversees the disposal each year of some 70 tons of spent oil filters, hundreds of worn out tires, thousands of burned-out fluorescent light tubes and high-intensity discharge lamps. They also arrange for collection of hazardous waste that frequently is illegally dumped on MTA property.

Recycling is a major effort. Waste oil is burned as bunker fuel by ocean-going ships. Some used oil,



Victor Laury checks the sensor on an underground storage tank at Division 5.



Division 2 mechanics clean up diesel fuel spill.

blended with waste paint and chemicals ends up as tar paper, street tar or asphalt. Fluorescent tubes are broken into their components of mercury, glass and tin. Metal from used oil and transmission filters is turned into construction rebar.

The MTA spends some \$900,000 annually to contract with companies for waste cleanup and removal. By maintaining and properly documenting its environmental compliance programs, the agency receives \$25,000 each year from the state.

"The MTA is doing its environmental share in recycling and waste management," says Mike Stange, superintendent in charge of the Quality Assurance Department. "And, we're doing a very good job of it."

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