



CLEANTRAXX™ KEEPS THE TRACKS CLEAN FOR RWC INC.

Every fall, as another busy railroad spray season winds down, RWC Inc. invites its employees from all over the country to its Westerville, Ohio, location for a couple well-deserved days of grilling out, golf and maybe an ice-cold beer or two. Applicators who have sprayed railroads for 30 years share stories with guys who just completed their first spray season. Employees showcase their pit master skills, smoking ribs for the opening night barbecue. It's a celebration of everyone's hard work, and it's symbolic of the family mentality behind RWC's success.

Headquartered in Westerville, but with locations in Westfield, Massachusetts, and Memphis, Tennessee, RWC is one of the largest and most established railroad vegetation management companies in the business, dating back to 1961. It serves a stable of large railroad customers across the country, and is a founding member of the National Railroad Contractors Association (NRCA).

Longevity at this family-owned company starts at the top. Joe Hage is president and has been with RWC for 45 years. Brothers Rod and Jeff Osburn serve as vice presidents, and have been with RWC for 40 and 36 years, respectively. In fact, Hage and the Osburns' father, Wesley, worked together to start RWC's Westerville operations many years ago; and Brian Chateauvert,

who runs the Westfield location, has 42 years in, and is the son-in-law of RWC's founder, John Roy.

"Being a family-owned company has allowed us to keep things running lean on the management side," Hage says. "And even though we've grown to be one of the largest railroad applicators and have modernized our approach, our original values have remained consistent."

FRESH CHEMISTRY KEEPS RESISTANCE AT BAY

While the railroad business has certainly evolved since RWC was founded, the company's success stems in part from its ability to change and adapt right along with it, from the GPS-guided trucks and equipment it now uses to the herbicides those rigs systematically put out. One thing that hasn't changed is the basic reason RWC is contracted by so many railroads: the company provides total vegetation control from the mainline tracks to the railroad crossings and rail yards. And although it sounds simple enough, it is far from easy.

Reduced maintenance budgets at railroads, difficulty getting track time to spray, inclement weather — all can stop an RWC crew in its tracks. But perhaps nothing is more challenging than weed resistance. Over the years, weeds like kochia, marehail,

Palmer amaranth and others have morphed into super weeds that have become extremely difficult to control. It's mainly because of the tendency of many to overspray the same herbicides over and over, at higher and higher rates in an effort to maintain control.

"Weed resistance is a major concern for us," Jeff Osburn says. "We don't want to see kochia or marestalk breaking through on tracks we've just treated. RWC is always searching for new mixes to put out, because without new chemistry, we'd be in trouble."

Rotating in fresh chemistry is one best practice to keep resistant weeds at bay.

"We've been using a mix with Esplanade for years, but in our business you just can't keep putting out the same mix and expect to keep getting the same results," Rod Osburn says. "You have to keep things fresh, and we felt like it was time to move to something new."

In 2016, working with Homer Deckard, territory manager with Dow AgroSciences, RWC put out test plots of a new three-way bareground solution consisting of a mix of Cleantraxx™ herbicide with Opensight® and Spike® 80DF specialty herbicides. While RWC had worked with Opensight and Spike 80DF before, Cleantraxx was an entirely new chemistry to the railroad industry. When Deckard told them it might be a good fit for their program, it got their attention.

"We've had a great relationship with Homer for a lot of years, and he helped us put out some test plots with Cleantraxx," Jeff Osburn says. "If Homer thinks it will work, we are more than happy to give it a shot. And sure enough, when we went back and reviewed the plot results, we saw very clean lines."

Things went so well that the decision was made to start using the mix in 2017. And not just a little here and there.

"Based on the trial results, we decided to use the new mix of Cleantraxx, Opensight and Spike over quite a large geographical area," Hage says. "It made us one of the leading users of Cleantraxx in the railroad industry."

RWC estimates that between February and May, it sprayed upward of 20,000 acres using a mix of 2.5 to 3 pints per acre of Cleantraxx™ herbicide (depending on the area), 3.3 ounces per acre of Opensight and 1.25 pounds per acre of Spike 80DF.

"And those 20,000 acres were spread across the country, from the Louisiana Delta all the way to International Falls, Minnesota," Rod Osburn says. "It covers all different types of climates and soil types, along with other variables."

With such a wholesale changeover to a new mix, one might expect that RWC received some pushback from its customers. But Hage says it didn't happen, a testament to the long-developed trust RWC has built over the years.

"We've been doing this a long time, and almost all our customers look to us to make herbicide recommendations for them," Hage says. "We don't ever want to do anything that would risk that

relationship, so it's important that what we put out works, and works really well. Because there aren't many railroads that are shy about calling us up if something doesn't work so well."

Ultimately, the proof for RWC would be in the weed control results.

"The control we got this year was very good — in some places the best we've seen in several years — especially using the 3-pint rate of Cleantraxx," Jeff Osburn says.

Rod Osburn agreed. "We plan to use the same mix again in 2018," he says. "Our goal is to give our customers the most bang for their buck, and this mix is doing that for us."



Tracks treated using the Cleantraxx™, Opensight® and Spike 80DF® herbicides bareground mix in southern Illinois.



A close-up view of one of RWC's spray rigs.



More tracks treated with Cleantraxx™, Opensight® and Spike 80DF® herbicides, this time running through Louisiana.

EXPERIENCE AT ALL LEVELS SERVES RWC WELL

Danny Baugh and Ronnie Owen are both longtime applicators with RWC. Baugh is based in Memphis and Owen in Westerville. Each has been with the company more than 30 years, and if there's been a herbicide put out on a railroad, chances are they've worked with it. The two also team up every year to man the company's custom smoker built for use at the annual employee appreciation event. Both worked significantly with Cleantraxx™ herbicide this past spray season.

"Overall, Cleantraxx is a good product for us," Baugh says. "It took some getting used to in terms of mixing it because of how thick it is. It sits in a concentrate tank on our rigs before we add it to the mixing tank. We've learned we just need to make sure to give it a good mix before we start applying it."

When working with new mixes, it's not uncommon to experience a learning curve. Baugh and Owen mentioned the need to factor in how things like an area's rainfall and soil composition might play into the control they ultimately see. That's where RWC leans on its collective experience to navigate any challenges.

"We like the results we've seen so far with Cleantraxx, and we put it on a lot of different acres," Owen says. "I was surprised at the good job it did on foxtail, crowsfoot grass and crabgrass. We're able to get these in one pass without having to come back and re-treat."

There isn't much that RWC hasn't seen in more than 60 years helping to keep America's railroad rights-of-way safe and vegetation free. Now, as a third generation joins this family business, that certainly doesn't look to change anytime soon.

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When treating areas in and around roadside or utility rights-of-way that are or will be grazed, hayed or planted to forage, important label precautions apply regarding harvesting hay from treated sites, using manure from animals grazing on treated areas or rotating the treated area to sensitive crops. See the product label for details. State restrictions on the sale and use of Opensight and Spike 80DF apply. Consult the label before purchase or use for full details. Cleantraxx is not registered for sale or use in all states. Contact your state pesticide regulatory agency to determine if a product is registered for sale or use in your state. Always read and follow label directions.



RWC is also responsible with maintaining total vegetation control within rail yards.