

Envirospec's New School Keeps Contractors in Business

by Allison Hester
Publisher of *Pressure Cleaning Contractor Magazine*



"The REALITY is that if you have to RELY ON A DISTRIBUTOR to keep your equipment running, you're OUT OF BUSINESS.

You just don't know it yet."
– John Allison, Founder of Envirospec

John Allison has said this for years, and the words ring as true today as when he started Envirospec over 25 years ago.

It's a principle that Allison learned while "in the trenches," starting one of the nation's earliest contract cleaning businesses back in 1972. "That was before there were 800-numbers to call or Internet sites to look up if I had questions. If my machine broke down in the middle of the job, I knew I had to figure out how to fix it or I wouldn't be able to make my house payment."

Top: Inside the Envirospec Warehouse, a virtual "candy store" for contractors!

Above Right: John Allison testing one of several new products Envirospec is bringing to market in 2012.

So John learned to fix his equipment when it broke down in the middle of a job. He figured out tips and tricks to help him clean faster and more efficiently. He developed gizmos and gadgets that improved his bottom line. And he created chemicals that worked better and less expensively than what was available in the marketplace.

"The chemicals we manufacture today were created by me in the field many years ago. I decided if I was going to stay in this business, I could not afford to buy \$500 drums of soap that didn't work from a guy wearing a Hart, Shafner & Marx suit who's never washed anything in his life." Today, Envirospec's chemicals "go up against the biggest companies in the world and walk away with the deal every time. It's because the products were built in the trenches where

it really counts – and they work.”

By 1985, Allison’s contract cleaning company had grown too big, covering six New England states plus New York, with 22 trucks and 35 crews. It was time to sell and change directions. “I knew how to build machines and I knew how to make chemicals that worked,” he explained. So he decided to take his chemicals and machines to market. “Then I figured, ‘Well, if I’m going to do that, I might as well sell parts too.’”

And that’s how Envirospec began.

Keeping Contractors in Business

Pressure washing is easy to get into. With no real requirements and low startup costs, every Spring new companies pop up in almost every community. But as soon as their equipment breaks down, they cannot afford to have it repaired or replaced, and they are out of the industry.

“That’s because there’s no one like us who has

“85% of all contract cleaning companies are
OUT OF BUSINESS
within two years.”

- John Allison

said ‘come on down and let me show you how to stay in business.’” At least not until now.

To help contractors become and stay successful, Envirospec has begun hosting a monthly hands-on Systems Certification School and Symposium, teaching how to troubleshoot and repair pumps, chemical injectors, unloaders and burners, as well as properly maintain engines. Participants also practice putting together a pressure washing system from the ground up.

“Most of the problems that are generated by contractors come from using their equipment. So if it breaks on the job at 10 at night, you’ve got a problem. You know you’re not going to be able to make the

“The **MOST EXPENSIVE**
way to go into this industry is to
BUY CHEAP.” - John Allison

John Allison believes it pays to invest in quality. That is why Envirospec builds the industry’s finest equipment, manufactures exceptional chemicals that were developed in the trenches rather than in a lab, and provides the industry’s most comprehensive technical schools. “We have also introduced more time-saving and performance-driven innovations to the industry in the last 12 months than all other companies combined have produced in the last 10 years.”

However, he also believes contractors should not have to pay ridiculous prices for quality products.

That’s why Allison knows he is probably his vendors’ “least liked person” because he fights them “tooth and nail” when it comes to getting the best price.

“I don’t want to make a lot of money,” he stressed, “but I do want the people who buy from us to get a bargain.”

Before founding Envirospec in 1985, the only dealers out there sold everything at retail prices.

“I was one of those people who worked hard then struggled when my pump went down and I had to pay full price to replace it. That was my profit. That was my car payment.”

When Allison started Envirospec in 1985, he decided to do things differently. He would target customers nationwide so he could sell at low cost, high volume. He would keep his staff small but efficient, move product quickly and not hang on to dead inventory. As a result, Envirospec is able to offer the highest quality products available on the market at low costs.

When it comes to working with vendors, he stressed that he will always walk away with the best price. “It doesn’t increase our bottom line, but it’s going to ensure that the guy who is out there working seven days a week to feed his family is getting a deal,” he added. “If there were not people like us, there would be a lot of people making twice as much profit off of a pump.”

Though this has often been an unpopular approach with his vendors and competitors, it has definitely benefited the contract cleaner. It has also helped pave the way for other well-known distributors who have followed Allison’s lead.

“Everybody has been able to build a business because we went to the vendors and scratched tooth and nail,” he concludes.

"This was, without a doubt, the
MOST INFORMATIVE
hands-on event yet for me!"

- David Styles, High Tide
Exterior Cleaning Solutions, Inc.,
St. Augustine, Florida

house payment tomorrow unless you can get this contract done tonight," explained Allison. "But, if you can sit down, try to figure out why it broke and how to patch it back together, you're light years ahead of your competition."

A School for Newcomers and Veterans Alike

In December, I was invited to join with 25 contractors from across the country to participate in Envirospec's pilot symposium. In addition to the hands-on repair classes, participants got the opportunity to test all types of equipment, enjoy fantastic barbeque, network with other contractors and have Allison's honest feedback on a multitude of questions.

David Styles of High Tide Exterior Cleaning Solutions, Inc., in St. Augustine, Florida, has been in the pressure washing business for several years, but came from a banking background. "So I really knew nothing about maintaining my machine," he explained. In fact, any time his equipment broke down, he had to drive it to Jacksonville – located 40 miles away. "It costs me \$45 in fuel just to take it in, then the equipment still isn't right after I get it 'fixed.'"

Prior to the symposium, Styles rated his comfort level for working on equipment at a "2" (out of 10). By the time he left the following afternoon, he rated his comfort level at an "8," and added that he would be willing to attend the class again.



For those individuals – like Styles – who were unfamiliar with working on their equipment or who were new to the industry, the course's benefits were obvious. But even industry veterans such as Dana McGowan – who has owned Top Gun Power Washing Innovations in Savannah, Georgia, for over 25 years and who has even built his own equipment – said the class was well worth attending, giving it a "10" out of 10. "Even though I already knew quite a lot about working on equipment, I feel way more comfortable taking my pump apart now," he added.

Pumps, Unloaders, Chemical Injectors & Burners

“We're going to talk to them using language they can understand and that they can relate to every day,"

Allison told me prior to the class. And he was right.

Day One began with Allison and his Technical Services Manager, Ernest Beecher, leading the group in a hands-on demonstration of how to take apart and rebuild a pump. "Contractors are often afraid of the pump. But the thing is, if it is broken, you're not going to break it any more by taking it apart and

"John could **ANSWER**
THE QUESTIONS

I haven't been able
to get answered locally."

- Carl Lamb, Cracks & Crevices
Pressure Washing, Jacksonville, Fla.



Maurice Clark of M S Clark in Albany, Georgia, added that he planned to pull a couple of old “broken” pumps out of the scrap metal pile when he returned home. “If nothing else, I can play with them and learn,” he explained. “Better yet, after attending this morning’s class, I can probably fix them and save myself a few hundred dollars.”

Starting in January, Chuck Welch – “technical services guru” who worked many years for General Pump – will be handling the equipment and pump programs. “We are truly excited to have Chuck join our team,” said Allison. “We have been friends for years and I am convinced that very few in this industry know as much about pumps, unloaders and their application as Chuck.”

Chuck Welch and Greg Dupree (Kohler Engines) are just two of the industry experts Allison plans to add to the instructional team in 2012.

In the afternoon, the group left the Envirospec classroom and headed to the company’s warehouse for a class on fixing burners. “Burners are a nightmare for everyone. They scare people to death,” said Allison. But then he added, “A burner is probably the simplest thing there is to fix.”

One of the hardest and most time-consuming

trying to fix the problem,” Allison explained.

Allison and Beecher taught the attendees to dismantle the pump piece by piece, helping them troubleshoot problems, then making sure everyone had the opportunity to put the pump back together.

The pump class ended around 11 a.m., and contractors such as Jonathan Bischoff of Karen Bischoff, Inc., in Milner, Georgia, said the trip to Homerville had paid off. “We’ve already learned enough for the school to have been worth attending.”

NEW TIME-SAVING PRODUCTS FOR 2012

“I get bored easily,” admits John Allison. “This is the duller industry because nothing changes.”

However, he plans to correct that for 2012.

A “professional tinkerer,” Allison works every day developing new products that will make contractor’s jobs much easier. This year, Envirospec will be introducing many new products that will save contractors time and money. Here’s just a sampling:

- The Burner Diagnostic System
- The Allison Foam Turbine
- A New Trigger Gun
- 3 New Pumps
- A Line of 40 Horsepower, Big Block, High Volume, Dual Pumps

Each item was created with the contractor’s needs in mind by someone who spent many, many years “in the trenches.”



"I now realize that the
**MECHANICS OF THE
EQUIPMENT**
are not as complex as we
often think they are.
**BURNERS ARE THE
PERFECT EXAMPLE."**

– Maurice Clark, M S Clark, Albany, Georgia

aspects of fixing a burner is diagnosing where the problem is. To help simplify and greatly speed up the troubleshooting process, Allison demonstrated a new product that will be entering the market in 2012 – the Burner Diagnostic System. "It all stemmed from me remembering what I did when my burner didn't work back when I was cleaning in the field, and what I did to fix it," Allison explained. "I've decided it's time to bring that solution to market."

Envirospec's new Burner Diagnostic System attaches to the burner and has three lighted buttons, each indicating a potential problem:

- The blue button checks the flow or pressure switch
- The green checks the thermostat
- The red checks the hi-limit.

By simply pushing each of the buttons, the controller lets the contractor know within seconds which part of the burner is not working, saving contractors time, heartache, and ultimately, money.

"I plan to buy one of those next year," said McGowan following the demonstration. "In fact, I have a list two miles long now of things I want to buy, but that is at the top of it."

Of course, diagnosing the problem is only part of the fix. Contractors need to learn how to repair the problems as well. In the class I attended, participants watched Allison diagnose and repair the problems, but future classes will take a more hands-on approach – similar to the pump class.

By the end of the day, all attendees that I interviewed said they had learned at least something worthwhile, with several feeling significantly more comfortable working on their own equipment.

"Before, I would make small repairs and have the larger repairs done at a local repair shop. After



the class, I will make all of the pump, burner and unloader repairs myself," said Lamb. "I'm confident that I can make any repairs on my system except major engine repairs."

Styles, who felt very uncomfortable with the idea of fixing his pump before the class, concluded the day by saying, "There's really nothing to it."

In fact, it became clear to many how they had paid exorbitant prices to their local service providers for what was actually a simple fix. "Everybody who takes this class is going to look back and realize how they've been ripped off by their repair guys," laughed David Sturgues of Cedar Savers in Kansas City.

Others told stories of simply throwing out pumps and other parts when they went down rather than trying to get them repaired.

But, as Allison pointed out, these contractors were losing more than money on broken parts. They were risking losing clients when down equipment prevented work from being completed on time.

"I DON'T WANT
to make a lot of money,
but I DO WANT
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to GET A BARGAIN."

– John Allison, Envirospec



Building a Pressure Washing System

After enjoying an evening of barbeque and camaraderie, sponsored by EnviroSpec at a local eatery, attendees arrived the following morning ready to face a new challenge: building pressure washers from the ground up.

The group worked in teams to piece together two separate machines. “My group’s unit was an 18-hp Vanguard mounted to a skid plate. We then attached a gearbox, pump, unloader, inlet filter and bypass line,” said Styles.

Once the machines were completed, the groups took them outside for everyone to test out. Styles, who was already in the market for a new machine, got so “attached” to the unit – “with its PA gear drive and the new Quantum Z unloader – that he brought it home “with a great show special price. Thanks again EnviroSpec!”

Allison also offered anyone who attended the class the opportunity to come back and have a certified systems technician help them build their own machine at no charge (other than the cost of the parts).

Engine Maintenance

Next, Greg Dupree of Kohler Engines led a discussion on engine maintenance, which dispelled a number of engine misconceptions and provided greater insights on how to keep engines running better, longer.

The engine diagnostic and repair segment was the favorite part of the school for Rudolph Palmer of Optimal Power Washing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Palmer, who said he was fairly comfortable in working on his pump and engine prior to the class, felt “much more confident” working on these components by the time the school was over.

“After talking with Greg and looking at the engines, I think my next engine will be a Kohler,” added Mike Barrett of Barrett’s Pressure Cleaning in St. Augustine, Fla.



Playtime!

The second half of day two was spent “playing,” as attendees got to test out any and all equipment and accessories that they wanted to see in action. “It was kind of like being a kid in a candy store. You want to grab everything!” said Barrett.

This “playtime” also gave attendees the unique opportunity to test out products that they may otherwise have never considered trying. “I gained some great new insights by being able to see and test new equipment and products that were different from what I

"I really enjoyed learning about **DIFFERENT PRODUCTS** and seeing them work."

– Terrence Cardreon, AquaTech Services, Gulf Breeze, Fla.

use," said Glenn Igsler of Enviro Clean Pressure in Atlanta.

Additionally, the guys spent the afternoon – and the entire school for that matter – networking with one another, sharing experiences, tips and tricks, and just enjoying the fellowship of hanging with pressure washing contractors from other communities.

In fact, the comradeship of the attendees was mentioned several times as one of the most valuable aspects of the symposium. Allison – who recognized the importance of encouraging the group members to interact with one another – planned the school that way, allowing time during and in between sessions for the guys to network.

"The class size and the laid-back schedule was great," said Corey Dulaney of ABM Services in Saginaw, Michigan. "I also really enjoyed that it was hands-on and interactive rather than like other classes I've been to where you have to quietly sit in a chair and be bored for three hours. John did a great job of making it easy for us to network without being disruptive."

"Everything I learned was valuable, but especially the interaction among everyone concerning the equipment, techniques, and marketing strategies," said Steve Hill of East Coast Marine in Savannah, Georgia.

A Money-Saving Investment
During my interview with Allison prior to the school, he explained that a person

can go to college for years, invest thousands upon thousands of dollars in education, then, if they're lucky, make \$100,000 per year.

On the other hand, a pressure washing contractor can make the same amount of money by investing in education, only the cost is minimal – just \$300. "Where do you know that you can invest \$300 then make \$100,000 a year – working by yourself, setting your own hours and working 40 hours a week?" asked Allison.

He continued, "If you really want to learn how to make money in your business, spend \$300 and come to Homerville, Georgia, for a couple of days. We'll feed you, educate you, then when we send you home, you will be 10 years ahead of your closest competitor. Plus, you will have a contact you can call whenever you need to."

Starting in January, EnviroSpec will offer its two-day school once a month. The cost includes two lunches and one dinner, and all proceeds will go toward the Allison's animal shelter, Suzie's Friends, and the Shriners Children's Hospital in Tampa, Florida.

December's attendees agreed that the value of learning to repair their own equipment, the numerous tips and tricks shared, and the opportunity to try out new products was well worth it.

"I would be willing to pay much more than \$300 for the class to save me from having to buy a new \$600 pump," said Dulaney.



Lamb agreed. "Being able to do the repairs myself will save me a lot of money. Also the repairs will be done much quicker, saving downtime."

However, just being able to gain honest insights from an industry veteran like Allison and his staff made the school well worth the investment for many. "You simply can't put a price on John's knowledge of power washing and equipment repair," said Gary McIntosh of McIntosh Exterior Cleaning in Braden, Florida.

"I know a lot," said Allison. "Mostly because I sat on the back of that truck in 20-degree weather – while my water tank was turning into an ice cube – thinking I've got 15 minutes to figure this out or we're going to have a huge problem."

Overall, everyone in attendance agreed that the symposium was first-rate. "John and his staff did a phenomenal job hosting the school," said Igler. "John has a tremendous amount to offer. I would definitely go back and take other courses from Envirospec."

Hill agreed. "I, as well as the people with me, appreciate the opportunity Envirospec gave us and we look forward to continuing our relationship."

"John and his staff were awesome," said Barrett, adding that it was an "awesome two day school!"

Not only was it an "awesome" school, Igler pointed out that it is something that is "greatly needed in our industry." He concluded that after 10 years in the industry, he has never found a school that offered the things he learned at Envirospec. "John has a tremendous amount to offer."

"JOHN ALLISON
has done **SO MUCH**
for our industry over
such a **LONG PERIOD**
of time.

I have **COMPLETE**
CONFIDENCE
in him and his company."

– David Styles, High Tide
Exterior Cleaning Solutions, Inc.,
St. Augustine, Florida

Envirospec's Systems Certification School & Symposium

2012 Schedule

January 25-26

February 22-23

March 21-22

April 25-26

May 23-24

June 20-21

July 25-26

August 22-23

September 19-20

October 17-18

November 7-8

December 5-6

**Spaces Are Limited &
Fill Up Quickly**

To Register, contact Joseph at
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