

Cleaner

FOR RESIDENTIAL, MUNICIPAL AND INDUSTRIAL CLEANING CONTRACTORS



New Name, Same Face

A small-town contractor makes adjustments after taking on a national drain-cleaning franchise

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TECH PERSPECTIVE

The value of smoke and dye testing

READER PIPELINES

Adapting to changes in the industry

MONEY MANAGER

Keeping tabs on cash flow

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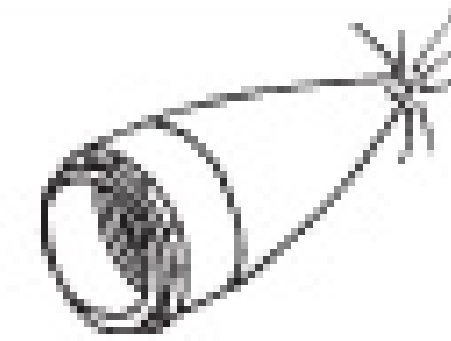
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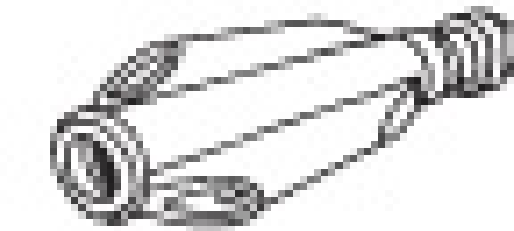
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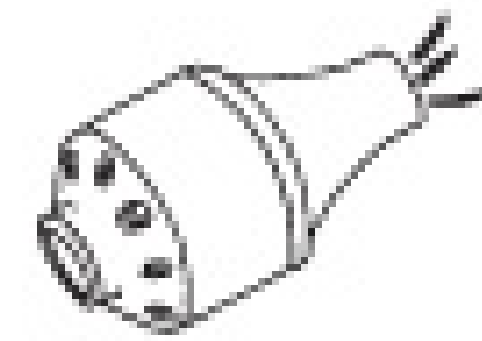
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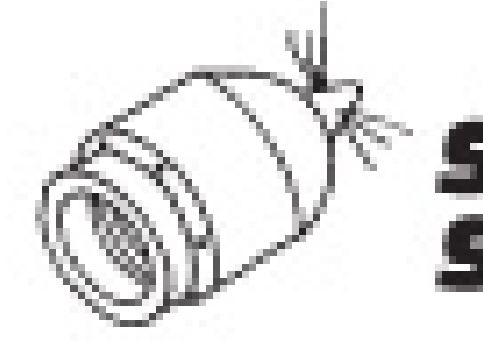


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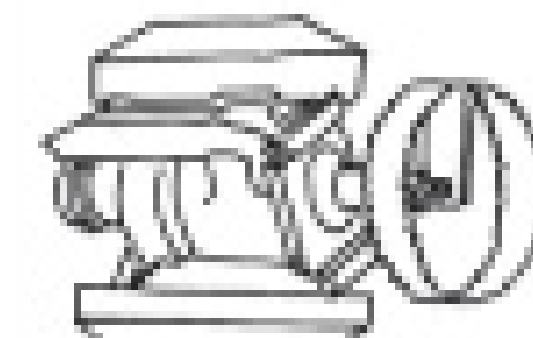


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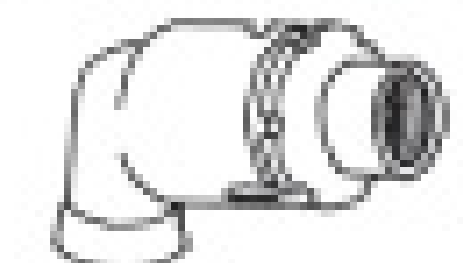


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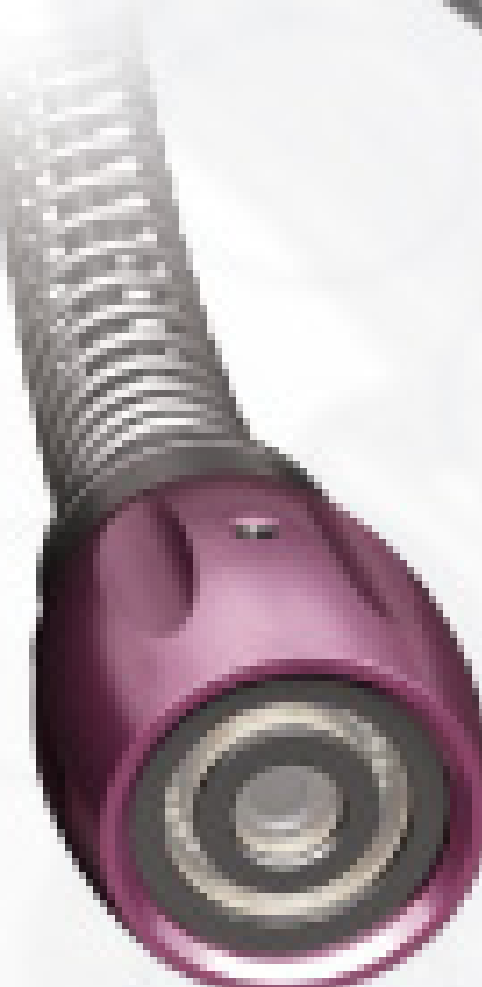
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On the cover: Allen Lewerer, co-owner of Mr. Rooter Plumbing of St. Croix Valley in New Richmond, Wis., had to make adjustments when he took on the national franchise. Here, he and Kim Hudson prepare to clean a drain with a cable machine after inspecting with a MyTana push camera system. (Photography by Casey Lake)

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Cleaner

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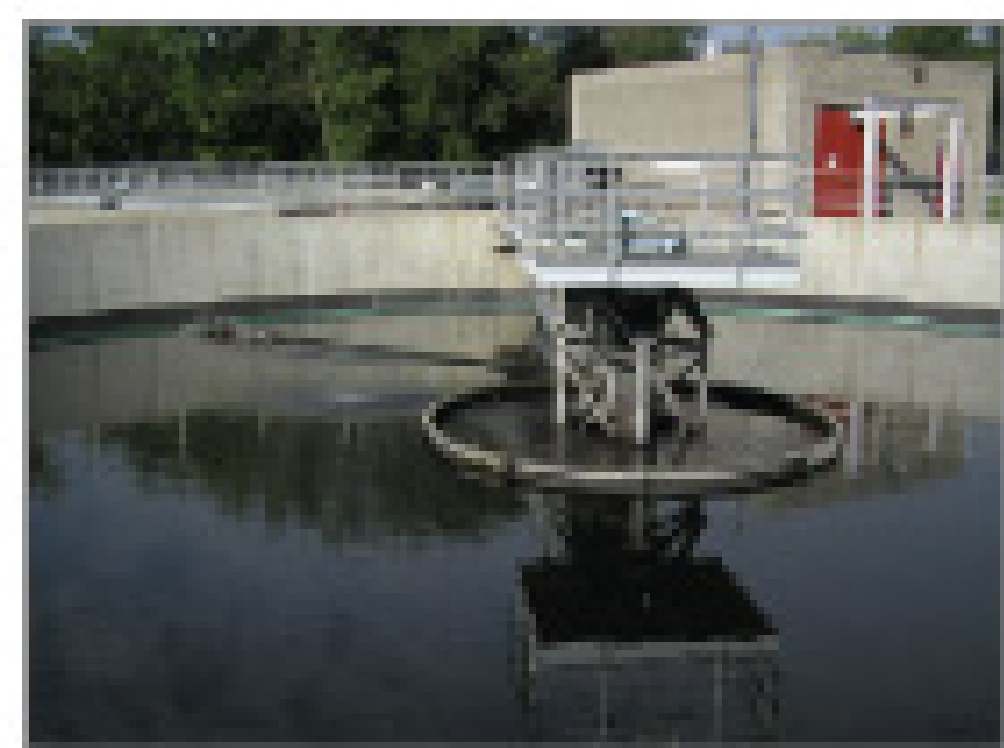
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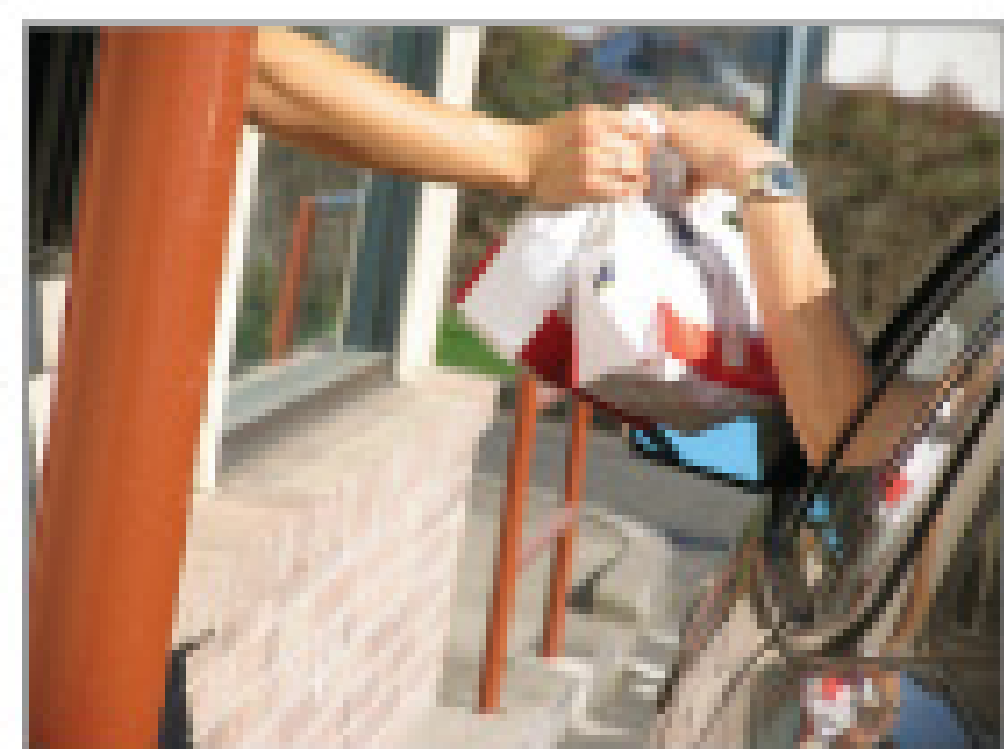
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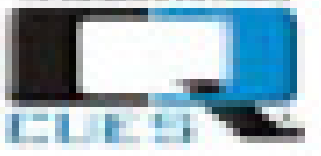





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Cleaning and service contractors share the logos they've developed to make an impression on customers and be top-of-mind in the market

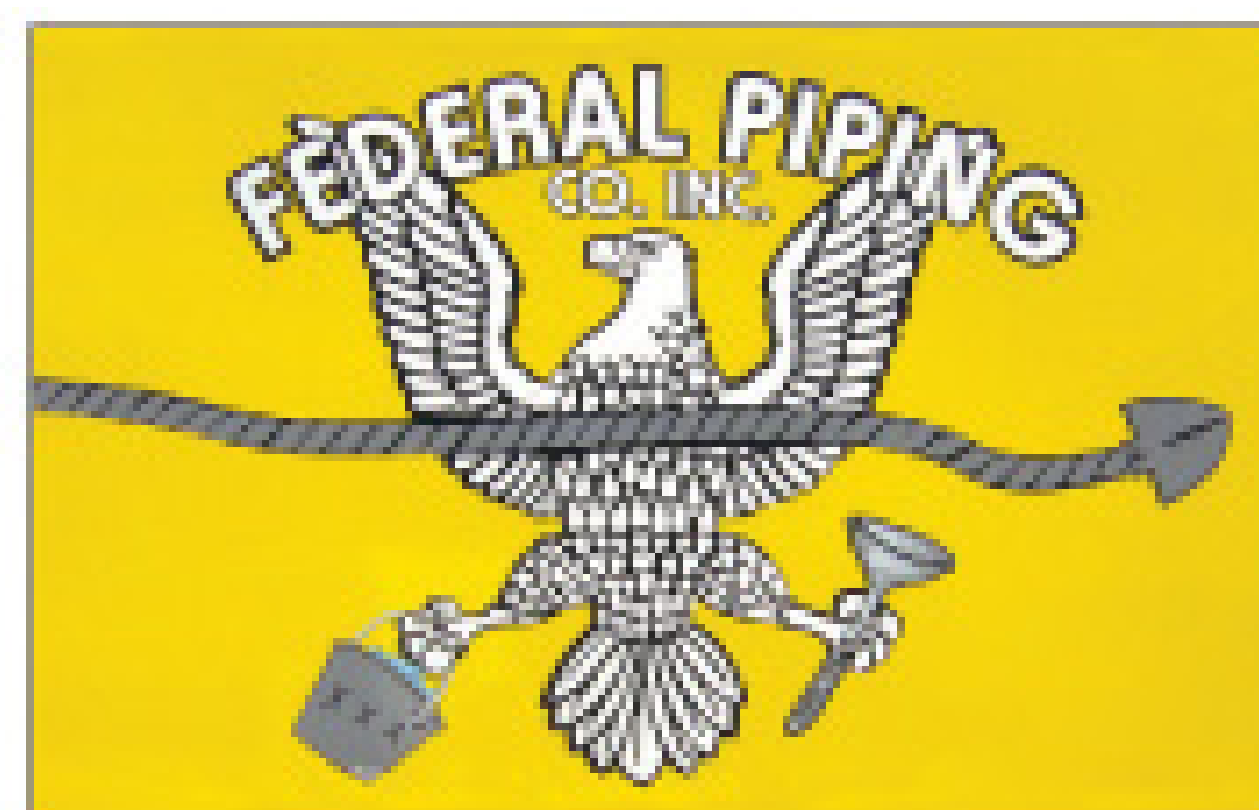
Ted J. Rulseh



American eagles, exploding toilets, poker hands, elephants, chess pieces, even plumber caricatures. That's what we got after asking cleaners last December to share their company logos. It's clear there is no shortage of creative talent in the industry.

The owners say these logos help them stay top-of-mind with customers. That's the whole idea — a symbol customers not only recognize when they see it on a passing truck but remember when they need help and are cruising the Yellow Pages. Here is a closer look at several of the logos sent our way.

Federal Piping Co. Inc., Freedom, N.H. David Boyd set up his business in Freedom in 1991, a newcomer competing mostly with one-man shops having close ties to the community. His eagle logo helped him get noticed and, after half a dozen years, gain a strong foothold in the business. A separate version for his sewer and drain division shows the eagle holding a bucket and plunger.



Boyd, who used to make pen-and-ink drawings of wildlife as a hobby, designed and created the logo himself. "I wanted something that would say, 'America,' he says. Today, the logo, displayed in yellow on black trucks, is widely recognized.

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DrainXpress, Philadelphia, Pa. Owner Donat Houle (pronounced da-NAY HOOL), came up with the logo with help from his wife, Mary, and a local graphic designer. When they started in business in June 2006, they just used the DrainXpress name underlined by the cleaning tool. Last January they added the spouting privy.

"We offer 24-hour emergency drain relief, and we wanted to convey that idea to our customers," Houle says. "I came up with the exploding toilet and took it to a graphic designer to give it a professional touch." The presentation clearly displays a toll-free number that should be easy for customers to remember.

Royal Flush Plumbing Inc., Seekonk, Mass. You can almost guess the slogan a company by this name would use. "A royal flush beats a full house" — ever hear that one before? This company takes a clever and more interesting approach.

Its slogan, "The Best Hand in the Game," relates back to the company name and the hand of cards held by the pipe wrench. But it also speaks to professionalism: Call this company and an expert comes to your house. Royal Flush has been in business since 1992.

Company representative Jane Watson says the firm created the new logo last year, with help from a graphic designer.



Scheer Inc., Grafton, Wis. A logo for a drain cleaning company doesn't have to show nozzles, snakes, toilets or drains to be effective. It just has to get attention and be memorable in some way. This logo, in bright blue and red, certainly catches the eye.

"We are a home repair and maintenance company that does many sewer, drain cleaning, and sewer televising jobs," says company representative Jason Scheer. "We started with two trucks and an enclosed trailer, and we are now setting up a box truck dedicated to just sewer and drain cleaning and televising." You can bet that truck will carry the Scheer logo.

Royal Rooter Sewer & Drain, Coventry, Conn. Owner Jeff Harrell observes, "My tagline has been, 'We clean your drain, NOT your wallet,'



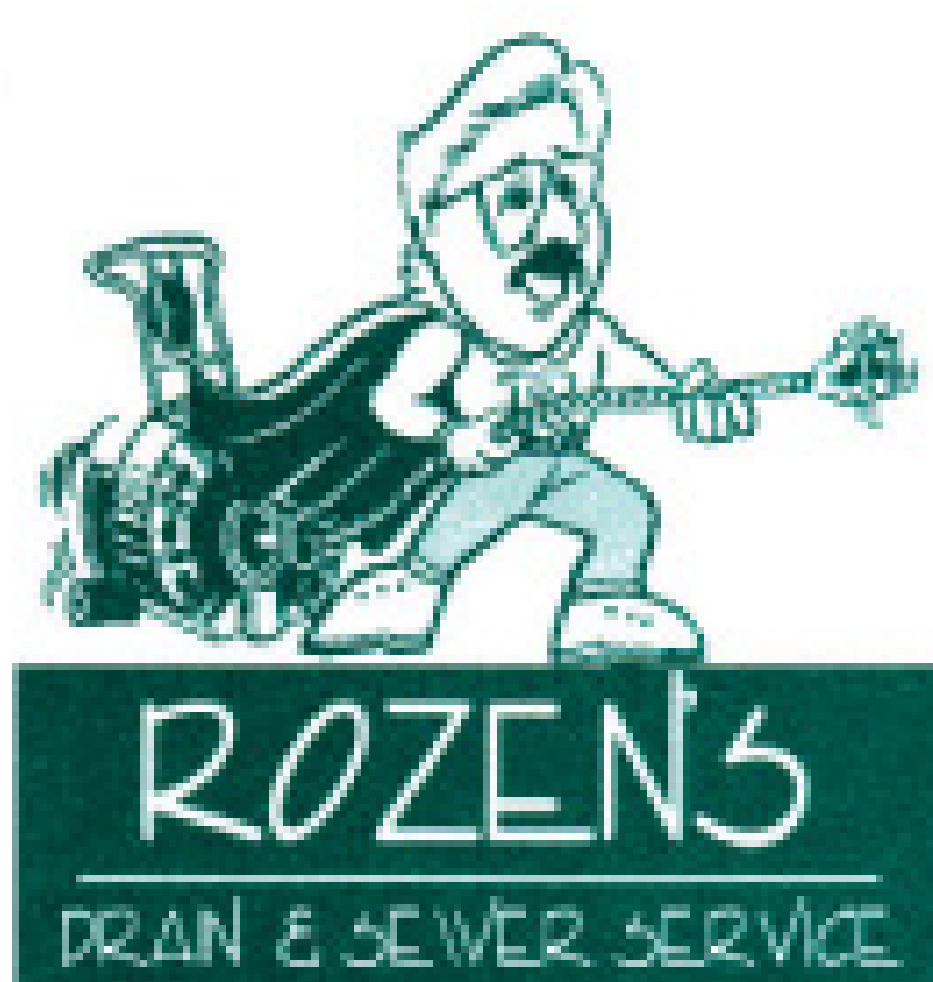
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NOT YOUR WALLET.

"We offer 24-hour emergency drain relief, and we wanted to convey that idea to our customers. I came up with the exploding toilet and took it to a graphic designer to give it a professional touch."

Donat Houle
DrainXpress
Philadelphia, Pa.

"When you create an identity, you have to stay with it," says Boyd. He gives T-shirts bearing the logo to regular customers. A few have sent him pictures of themselves wearing the shirts in front of tourist landmarks.



"WE CLEAN OUT YOUR DRAINS...
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Rozen's Drain & Sewer Service, Binghamton, N.Y. Residents of Binghamton may recognize the superhero plumber — its owner Hershey Rosen himself. Those who see the emblem may also remember what Rozen's does and doesn't clean. John Bon Fed, a friend of Rosen who is a caricaturist, created the logo, which the company has used for years. "The only difference is that my hair is gray now," Rozen says.

“They put the word ‘drain’ in blue for water and the word ‘medic’ in red for emergency. “Then they put the EKG trace across the top. When we saw that, we were hooked.”

Greg Arnold
Drain Medic
Levittown, Pa.

for seven years, and my customers love it.”

Drain Medic, Levittown, Pa. Owner Greg Arnold knew emergency service as a volunteer firefighter for 13 years. His wife is a nurse. So when it came time to start his drain cleaning company just over a year ago, the name Drain Medic was a natural.



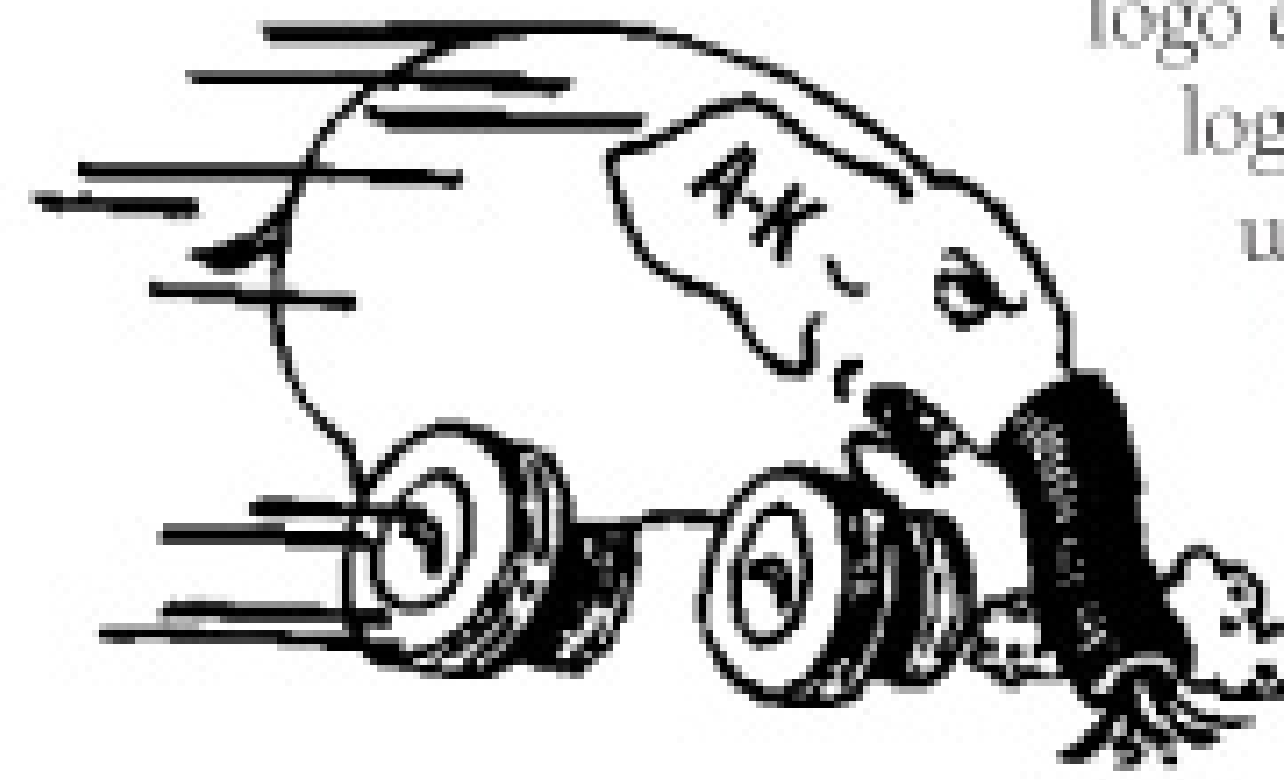
had in mind a red cross with a plunger across it. Knowing he needed help, he sought out a logo company on the Internet.

“They put the word ‘drain’ in blue for water and the word ‘medic’ in red

“We wanted a logo that would stand out,” he says. “We wanted it to be professional, not cartoony.” Arnold

for emergency,” says Arnold. “Then they put the EKG trace across the top. When we saw that, we were hooked.”

A-K Underground, Tinley Park, Ill. This company’s logo says “vacuum power.” The look on that elephant’s face tells you he means business. A-K specializes in pipe cleaning, vacuuming and jetting, and its brochure prominently features a green combination truck with the logo emblazoned on the sides. “We have had this logo for several years, and it seems to work for us,” says owner Al Kulig. “The credit for it has to go to my son, Greg.”



So, there’s an assortment of logos from independent cleaning companies. Each has its merits. Maybe each could be improved in some way. The important thing is that they seem to serve their purpose: to make the company stand out from competitors.

Perhaps you’ve learned a tip or two from these creative business owners. And maybe one key take-away is that you yourself don’t have to be creative — there are plenty of good design shops available, wherever you may be.

The real lesson, though, is more basic. If you don’t have a memorable image for your business, start now to create one. Give your customers a way to remember you. ■



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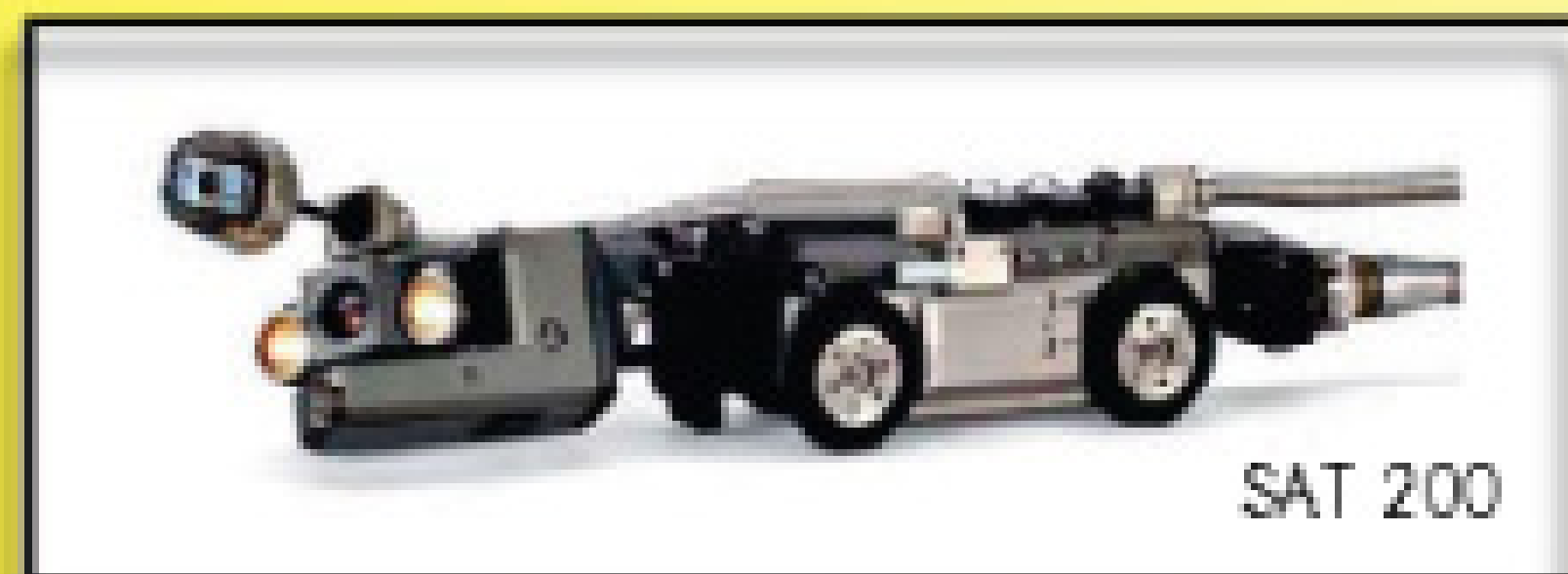


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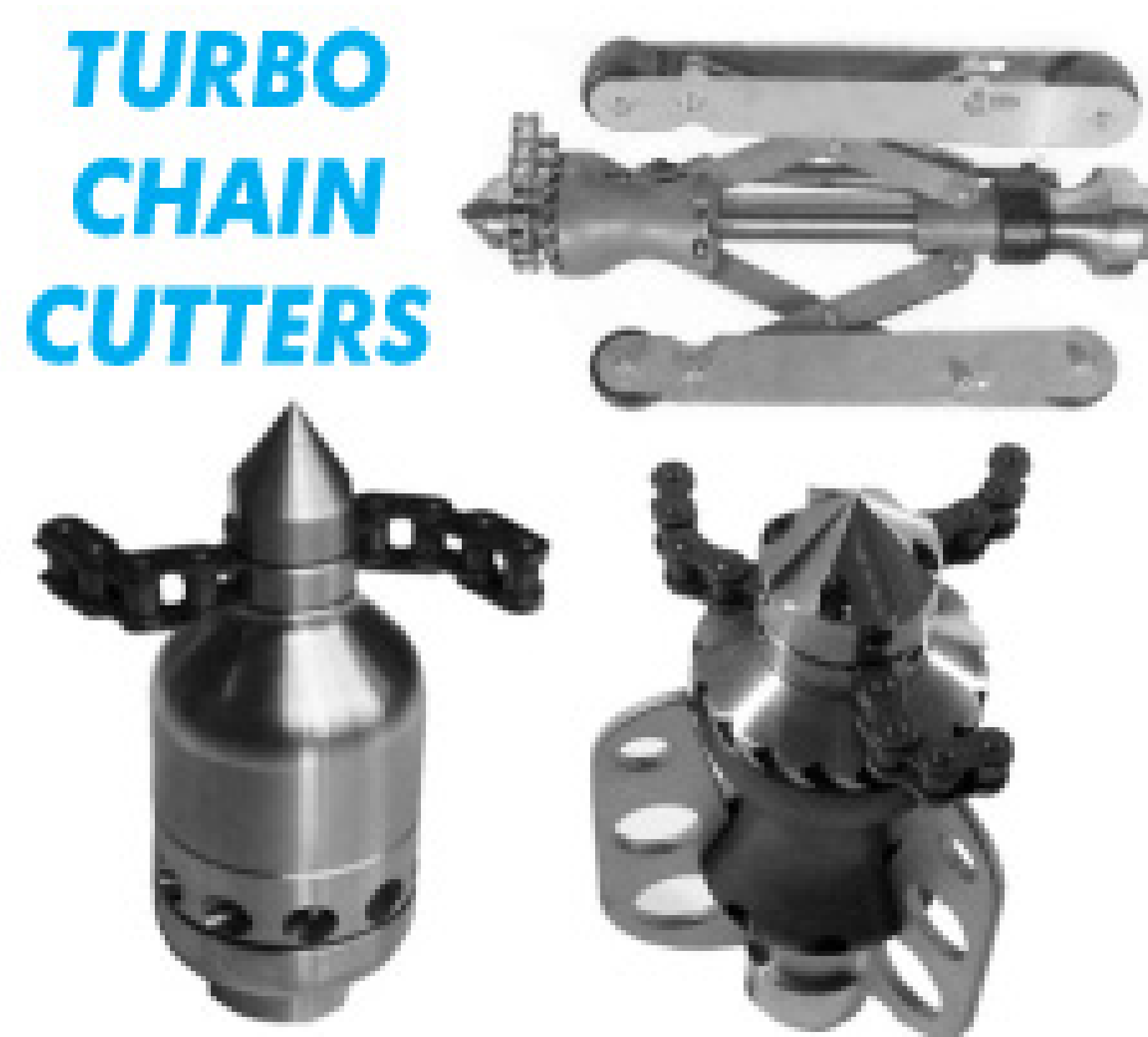
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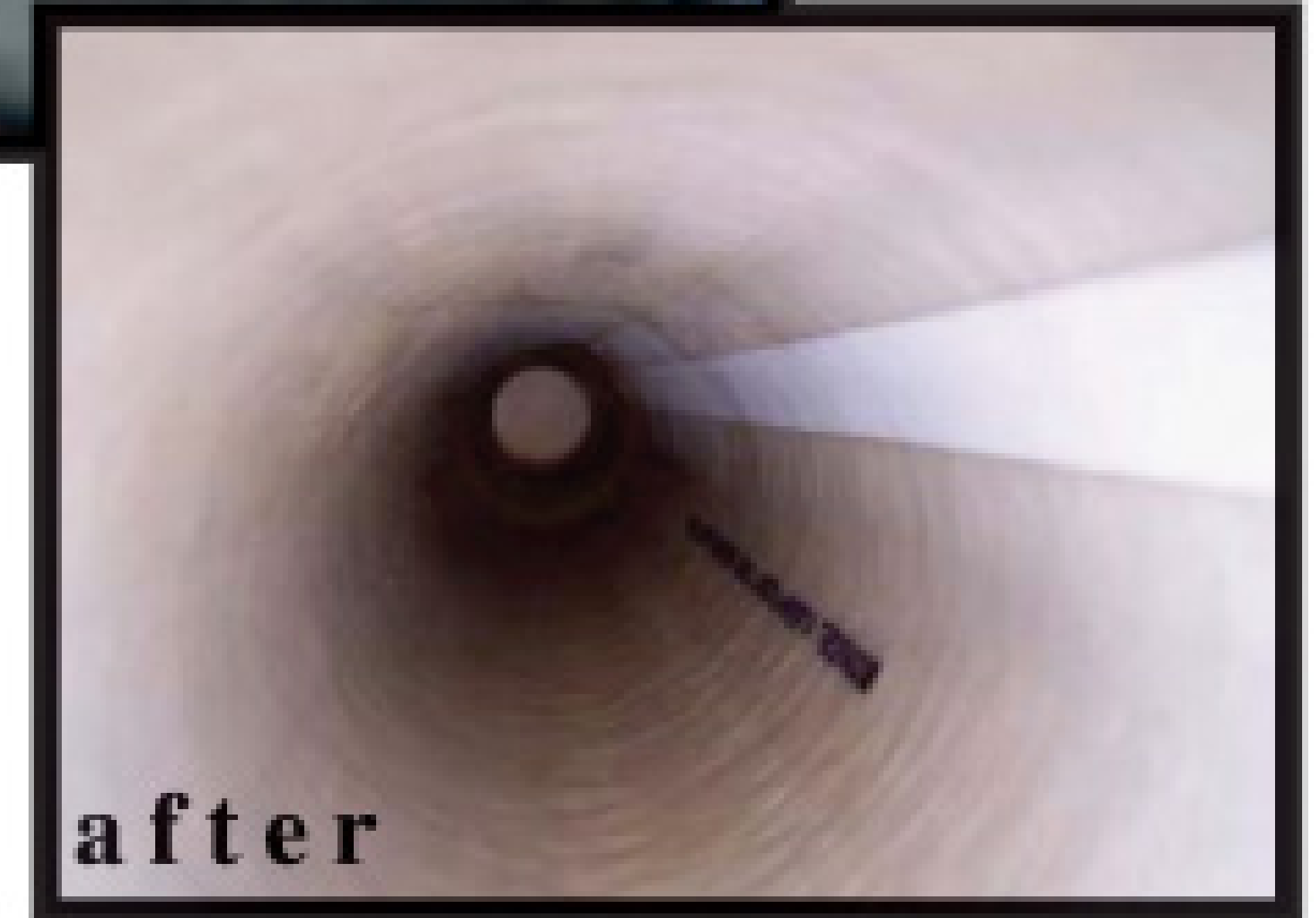
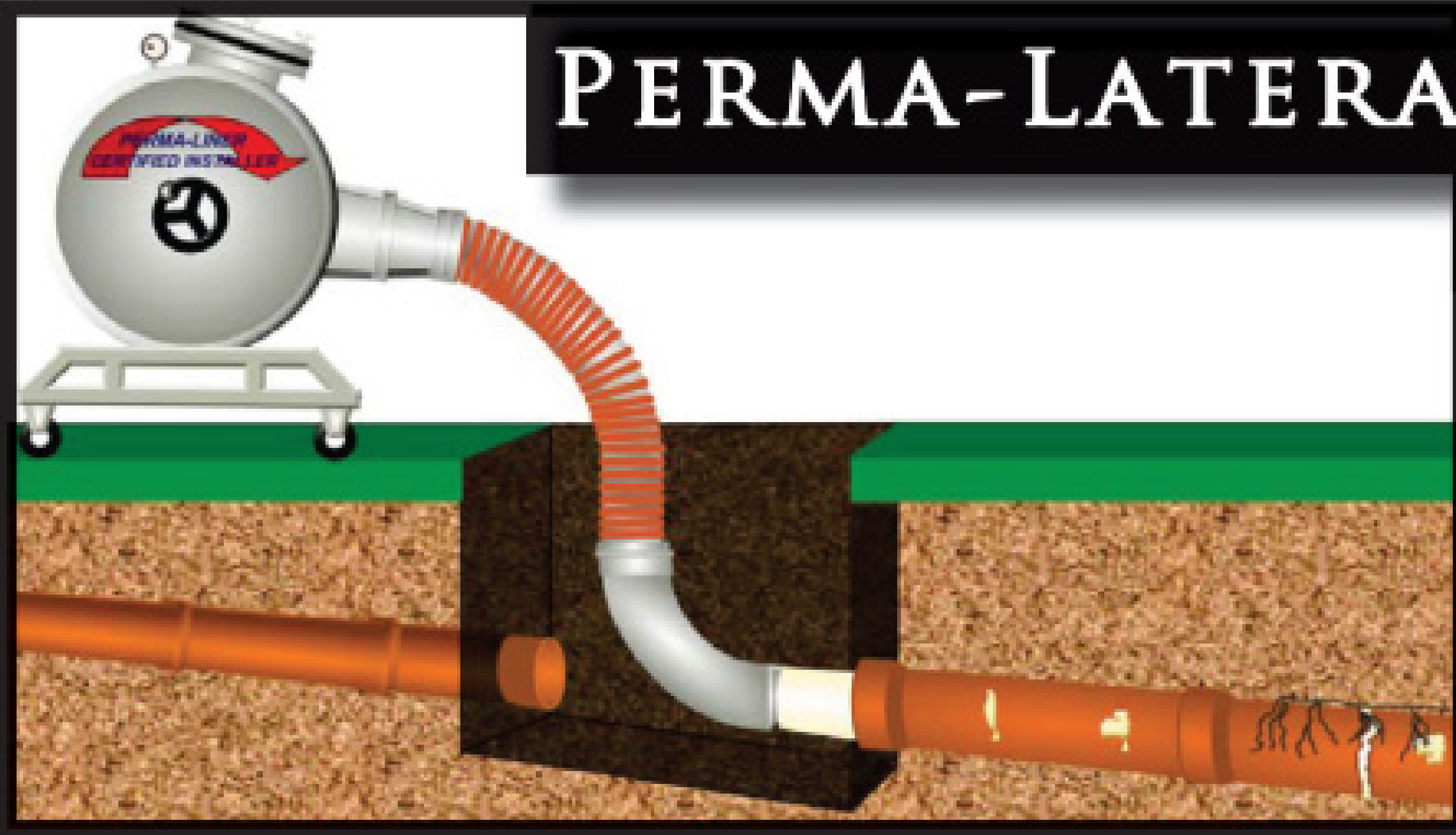
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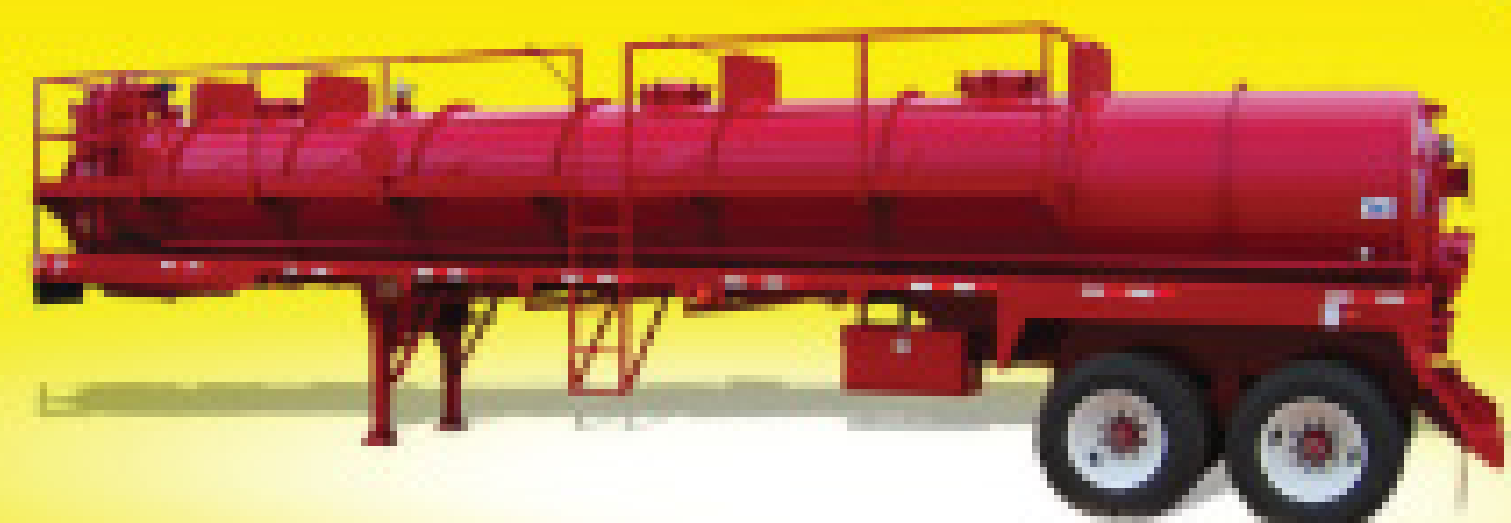
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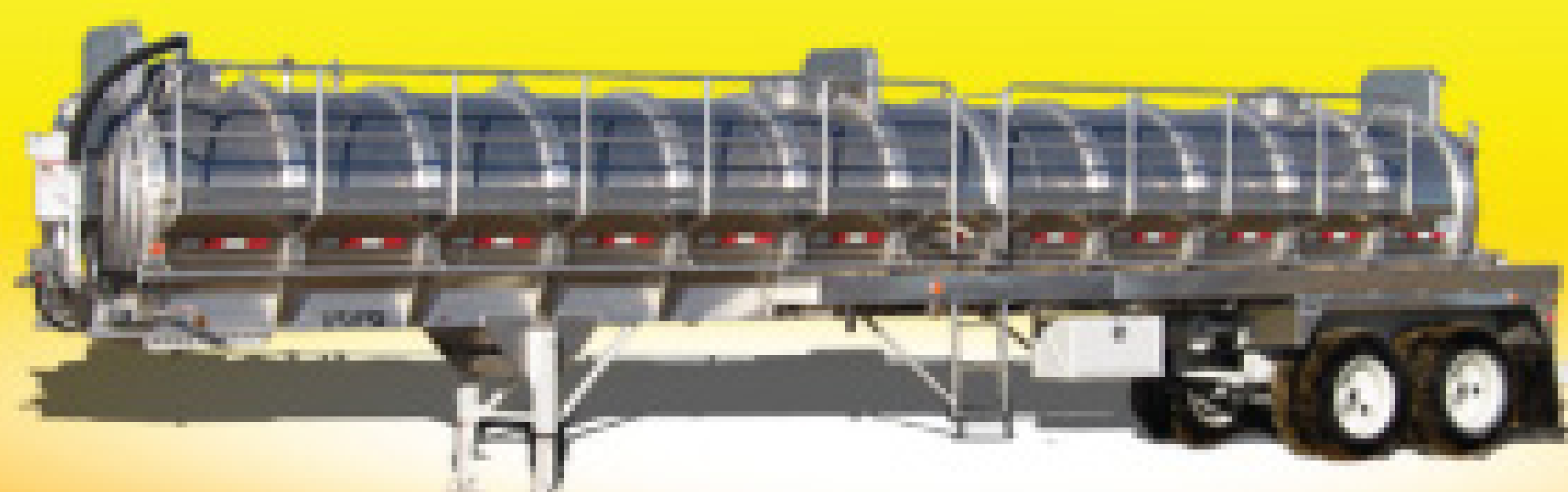
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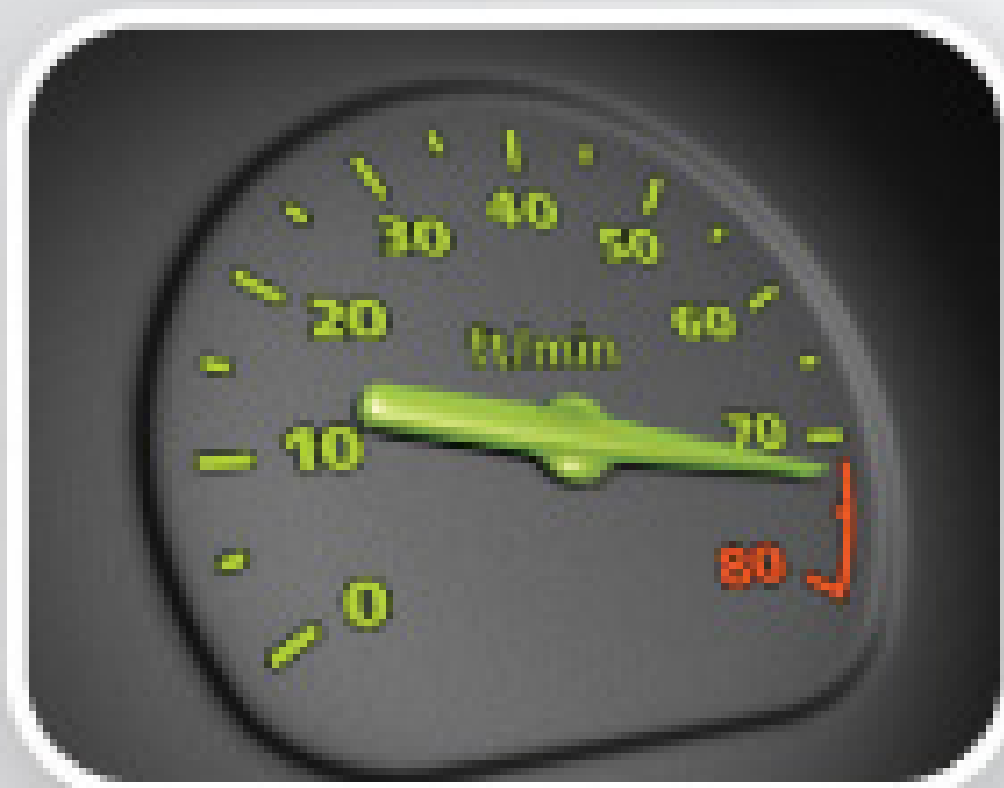
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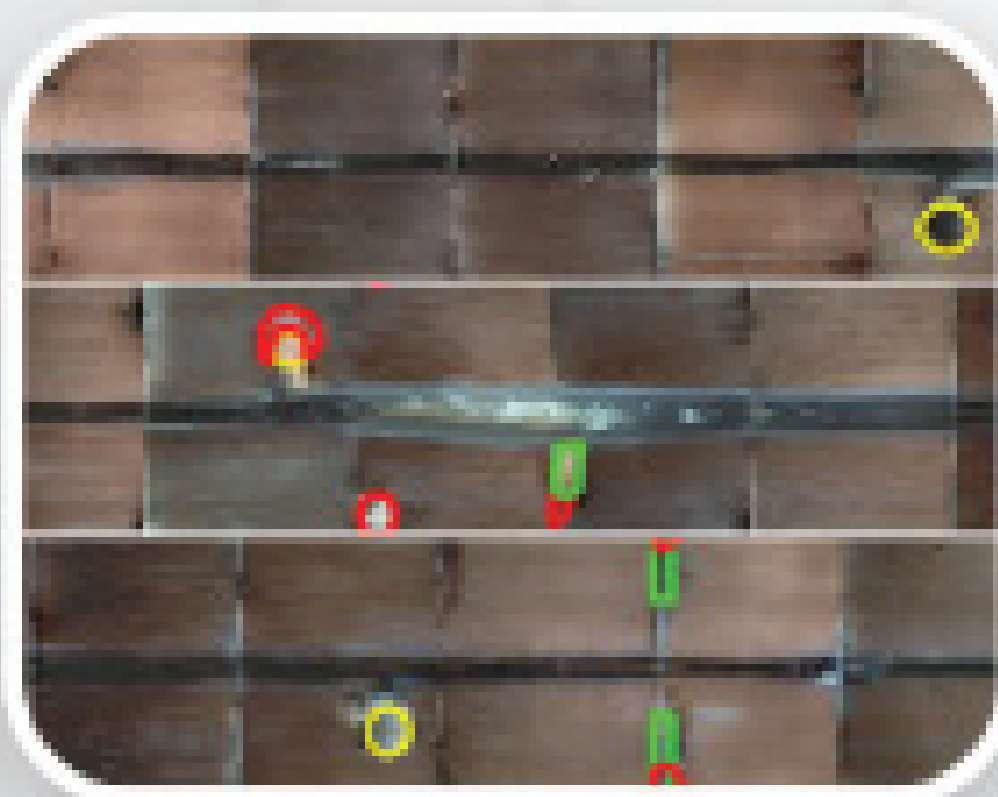
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Risky Business

Teaching employees to break the cycle of at-risk behavior begins with the business owner

By Gary A. Higbee EMBA CSP

When an employee is injured or experiences a near miss, perhaps you have asked yourself: Why did he do that? What was he thinking?

Or maybe you have wondered why you did something you wished you hadn't. We all take risks. Even as a safety professional, it wasn't until a

prevent potential injuries. The list isn't long. Only four errors are responsible for more than 90 percent of all the acute injuries people suffer. They are:

1. Eyes not on task; or moving hands, feet, or body without looking first.
2. Mind not on task.
3. Being in or moving into the line of fire.
4. Losing balance, traction or grip.

State of mind

None of us make these errors on purpose. Our state of mind greatly affects the efficiency and safety of our work. Errors occur when we are in one of four states:

Rushing. This doesn't mean just going fast. It means going faster than normal, which increases the risk of injury significantly. One

example is trying to finish in 10 minutes a job that takes 15 minutes under the best conditions.

Frustration. When things don't go well, emotions run high. The nut won't break loose, so you jerk on the wrench; it slips off, and you scrape your knuckles. Maybe some penetrating oil would have solved the problem, but once frustration sets in, clear thinking is ruled out.

Fatigue. Our society is suffering a sleep deprivation epidemic, but extended work hours, high exertion, boredom, and a host of other factors also can cause fatigue.

Complacency. We become numb to hazards.

Other states like depression, illness, and panic can take your mind and eyes off the task, but these four are most likely to cause trouble on a day-to-day basis.

the first three critical errors, but has limited effectiveness on complacency.

Analyze close calls and small injuries to prevent big ones. Learning to trigger on the state of mind takes time and practice, so while you're improving your safety skills, don't miss the opportunity to learn from mistakes. Analyze those errors and close calls to see what states were involved. If it wasn't a state, maybe a habit needs changing.

Observe others for state-to-error patterns. Here is where we find the most help with complacency. For example, when we see people driving erratically while trying to read a map or use a cell phone, we know something serious could happen. Avoiding them may be the best defense against injury. The driver is obviously very complacent.

Notice and intervene

It's always easier to spot the state-to-error pattern in co-workers, family, and friends. Noticing it creates a great opportunity to intervene before someone is injured, and it helps avoid complacency.

Changing habits and improving personal safety skills takes work. One thing business owners should stress to employees and do themselves is to look before moving and check the footing. Moving your eyes before you move your body (or car) is the best defense against injury.

Recognizing at-risk patterns helps you defuse those situations. As you practice, you will become more aware of these patterns in yourself. Try it, and see how the risk of injury at work or at home can be significantly reduced.

Gary Higbee founded Higbee & Associates Inc., a full-service safety training and consulting firm in Johnston, Iowa. He also is the Senior U.S. Safety Consultant for SafeStart and SafeTrack North America. For information on SafeStart, call 515/270-6623 or visit www.higbeeandassociates.com. ■

Acute injury pattern

Making one of the four basic errors increases the likelihood of injury, no matter where you are or what you are doing. It's fine to tell people to be careful, follow directions, and watch what they're doing, but that doesn't increase safety skills.

So what can business owners do about it? A few basic skill development techniques can help prevent injuries. While they are more effective when taught through a comprehensive course, you can learn a great deal about yourself and your personal safety skills by practicing these techniques, then teaching them to your team.

Self-trigger on the state of mind to prevent or avoid making the error. Many of us do this already. When frustrated, we stop and walk away from the task to regain our composure. But without practice, we may not trigger soon enough or at all. Learning to trigger when in a state of rushing, frustration, or fatigue can prevent us from making one of the four errors that get us hurt. Even when forced to rush, we can use that realization to increase alertness and focus extra hard on the task. This technique works well on

Safety FIRST

few years ago that I began to understand risk and why people take it.

Learning to recognize risk should be a part of every business owners' safety program. It allows you or co-workers to intervene and

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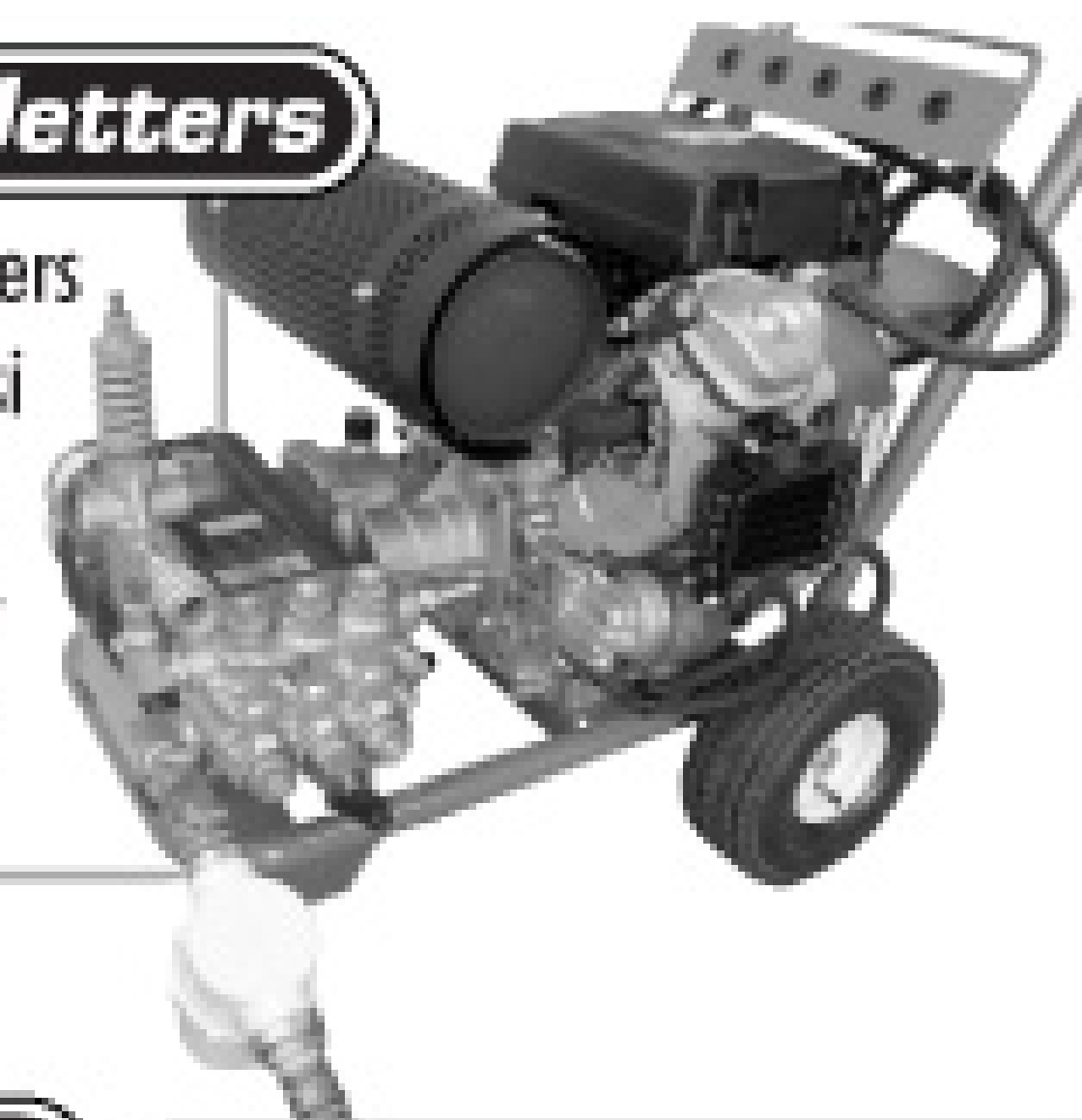


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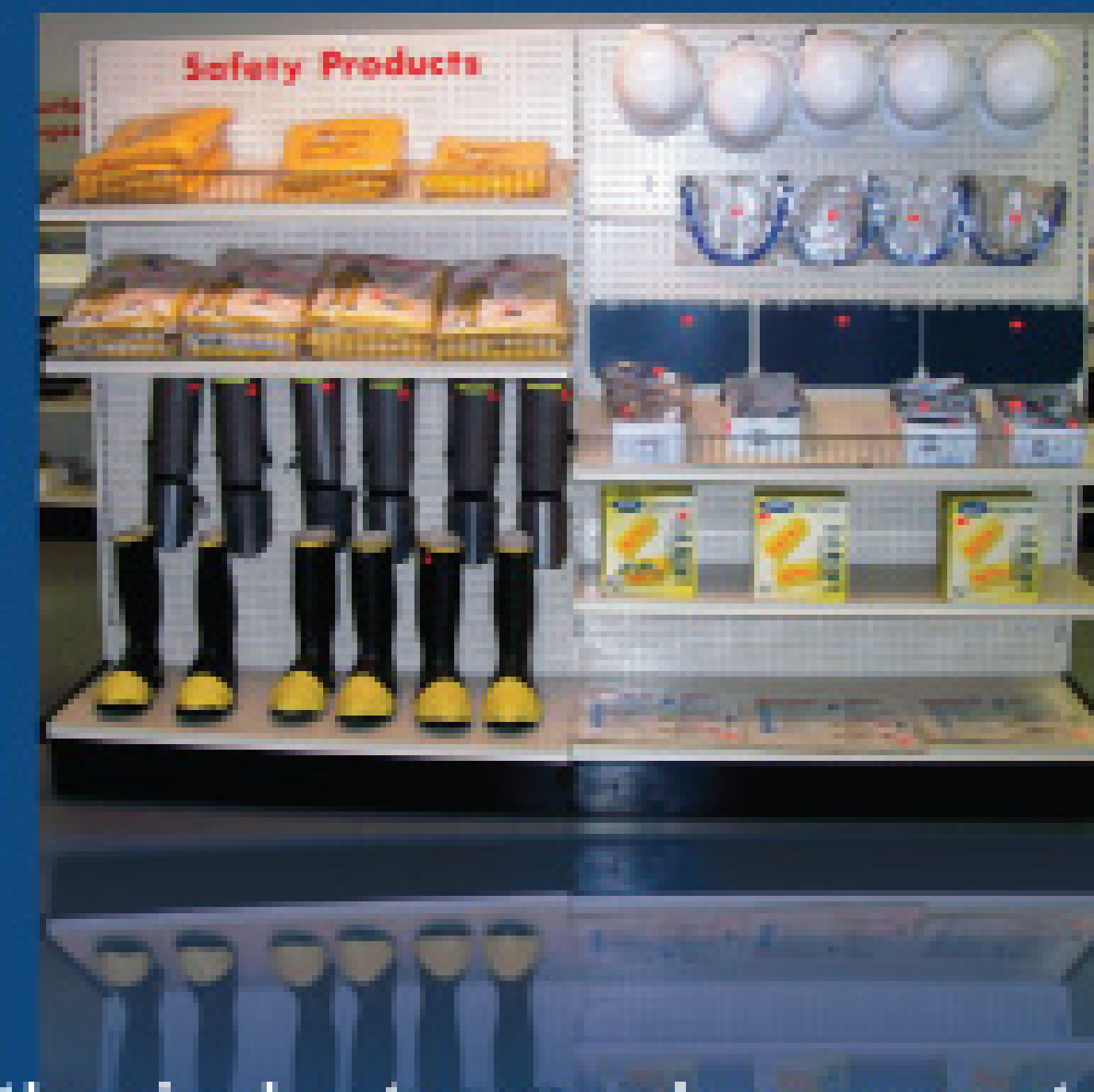
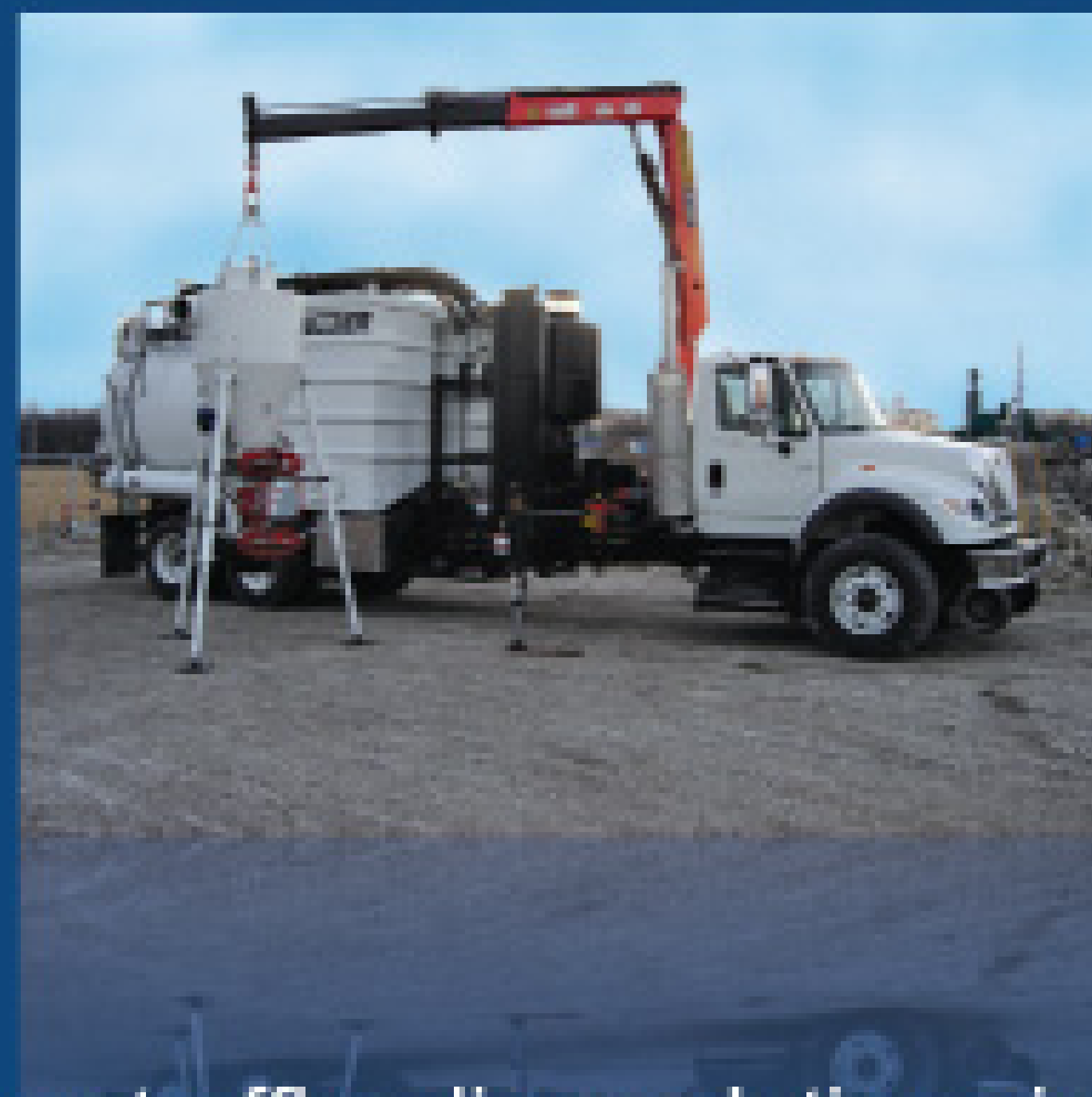
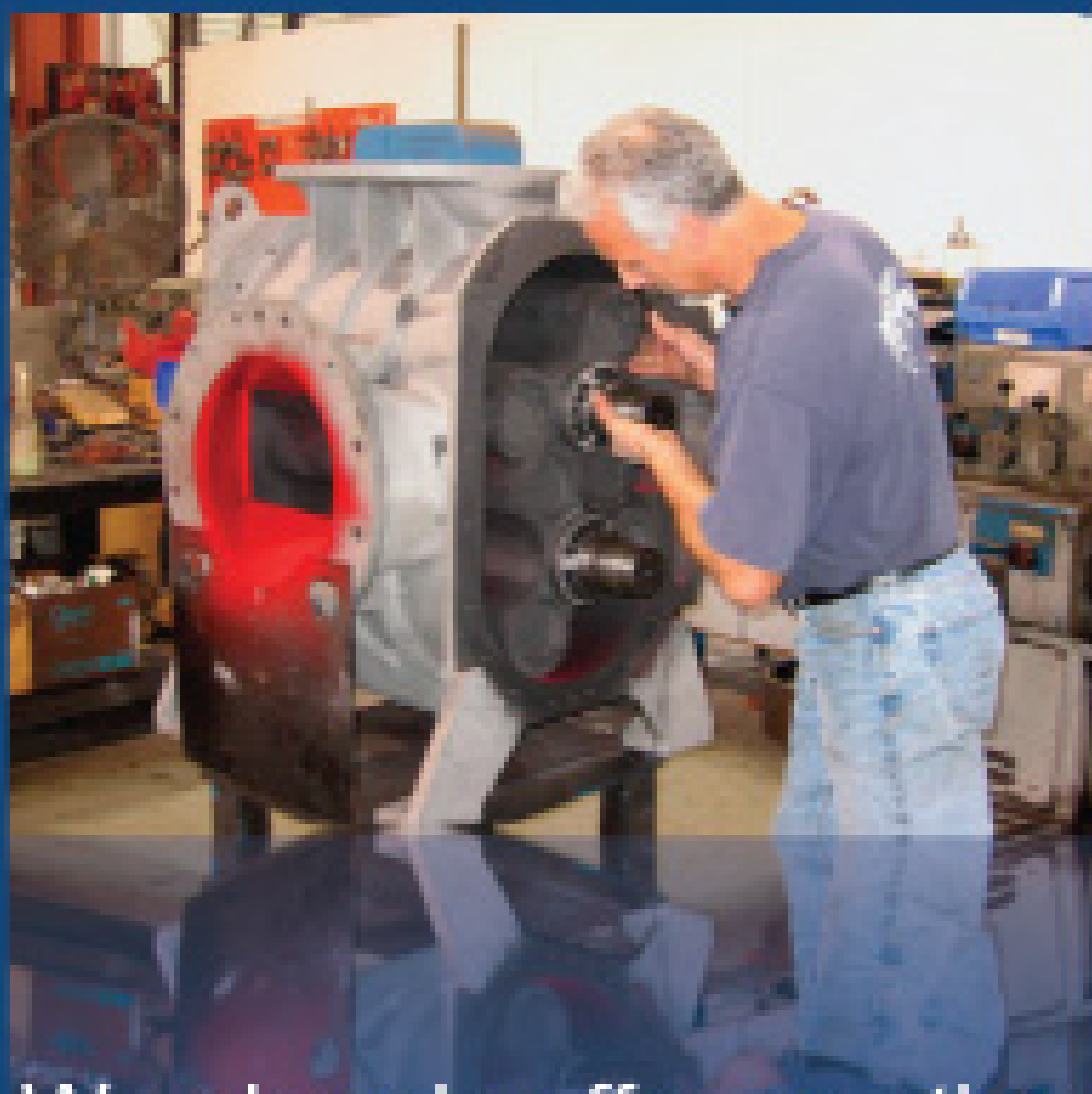
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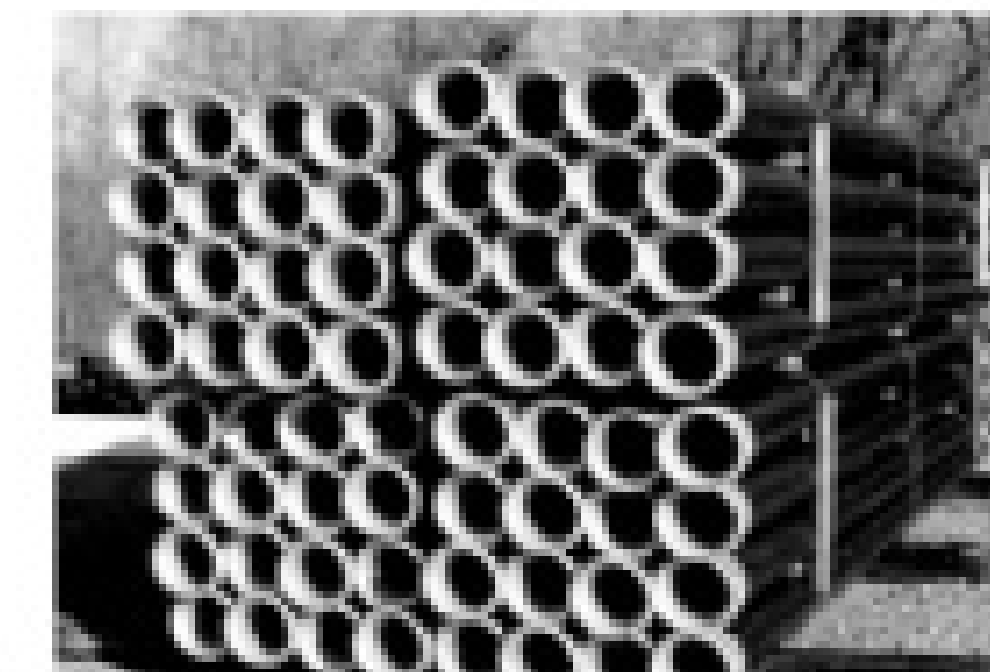
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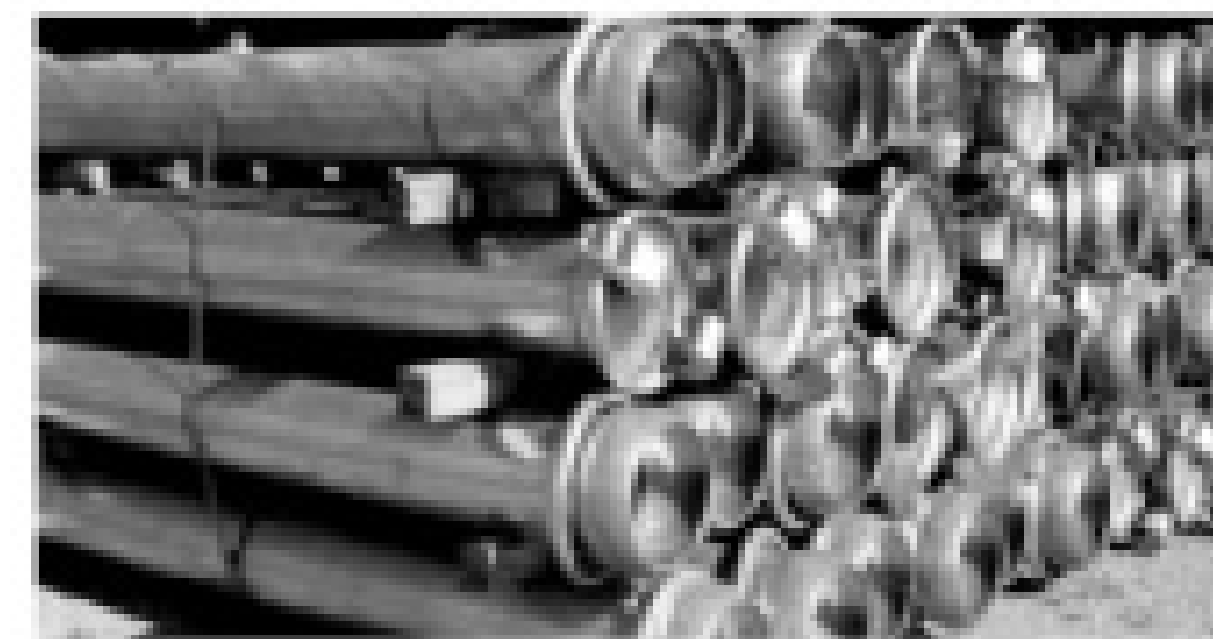
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Mastering Cash Flow

A key to success in business is managing what comes in and what goes out. These tips can help you keep monthly income ahead of operating expenses.

By Ty Freyvogel

Your success as a business owner comes down to whether you can pay your bills and still turn a profit. That may seem obvious — and yet achieving a healthy balance between monetary intake and output is an art that confounds many entrepreneurs.

It is no exaggeration to say that your ability to manage cash flow can make or break a business. Otherwise-successful business owners have crumbled under the stress of poorly managed cash flow. Likewise, owners have flourished under a well-structured, well-maintained accounting system.

Fortunately, it's not necessarily difficult to stay on top of the money coming into and going out of your company. Here are some practical insights:

Assume that your estimates are wrong — and save for a rainy day. No matter how carefully you plan for all potential cash-related scenarios, you can never accurately predict the weather of your operating environment. At any moment, a storm front or even an unexpected sunny day could appear out of nowhere.

It's a good idea to make rough estimates for your cash flow. Just be sure to give yourself a healthy margin for error and expect the unexpected. Keep a nice cushion of money in your account for surprise bills. Yes, entrepreneurship is based on taking risks, but where cash flow is concerned, err on the side of conservatism. Remember: Cash is king. Cash flow determines what you are able to do with your business.

Don't underestimate the value of a good customer. You have the choice to run your business as you see fit, but no matter how successful and powerful you become, remember that your customers are the reason you exist. The loss of a steady customer means loss of reliable income that can be very difficult to replace.

So be good to customers. One company may spend thousands or tens of thousands of dollars on your services over the years. If you're a consumer company, even one homeowner person can be worth thousands of dollars over the span of your business relationship. Never let success change your mission of giving all customers the royal treatment. They are the source of cash that you need to pay rent, taxes and other expenses, and provide a healthy profit.

Keep tabs on your expenses. Don't rely on your memory to know when to pay your bills, order new supplies or bill your clients. Even if you

run a very small business, you won't be able to pay everything on time if you don't have a system in place to help you keep track.

Choose some reliable method to help you track your bills and their due dates. Your system can be as simple as a notebook where you document when to write checks and when to deposit funds that come in. Far better, use computerized accounting software. Being well organized will ensure that your supplies are always in stock, your power never goes out, your employees get paid, and you make money.

Be firm but kind with clients. It is important to run your business in a manner that tolerates a certain amount of leniency — but don't let customers walk all over you. If you establish yourself as a pushover, even clients with the best intentions will take advantage of you.

On the other hand, you don't need to run your company with an iron fist. Find a happy medium that keeps you in business and keeps

Don't be afraid to politely call a customer who hasn't paid a bill and remind him or her that it is overdue. They understand that you have provided a service and that it requires a payment. You can preserve your client relationship and get your money by treating customers with integrity.

your clients happy. Don't be afraid to politely call a customer who hasn't paid a bill and remind him or her that it is overdue. They understand that you have provided a service and that it requires a payment. You can preserve your client relationship *and* get your money by treating customers with integrity.

At the bare minimum, break even. You have to at least break even each month in order to survive. In hard times, strive to break even — and then get back on track. Engrave your break-even number in your mind or sticky-note it to the front of your computer, and see that you surpass that number each month — by a healthy margin in all but the toughest times.

Here's a quick tip: If you are having problems breaking even, and if that means you may be late

in paying vendors, let them know. Don't keep them in the dark. No one likes surprises, especially your bank.

Be honest with the man. Never try to improve cash flow by cheating the taxman. Some (supposedly) clever people have filtered out money from their business and kept it out of the government's grasp — but usually only for a while.

You may get away with hiding money, under-reporting income, or fudging your write-offs, but the odds are against you. Uncle Sam has gone to great lengths to set up systems that keep this from happening easily. In general, the rewards of cheating do not justify the risks.

Why taxes are good — really! Many businesses try to show a very small profit at year's end so they can cut their tax liability. But if you keep your business account so low that you don't have enough cushion to pay an unexpected bill, cash flow is damaged.

Instead of taking tax avoidance to extremes, get out there and try to make more money. If you think about taxes in the right way, you won't view them as such a bad thing. In the end, paying more taxes is a sign that you are doing very well.

Keep away from credit cards if possible. Credit cards are necessary, but that doesn't mean that you should run up a mountain of debt. Businesses shut down because of factors like credit card debt, so swipe with caution if you have to swipe at all. Don't max them out, by any means. If you find that you have to max out a credit card, your business may already be in trouble and it is time to seek alternate funding.

Don't worry if managing your cash flow seems difficult and even overwhelming at first. After a few months, you will embrace your monthly monetary obligations. You may even find a sense of comfort in the ebb and flow of money. Like the tides and the seasons, cash flow has a natural rhythm that keeps you grounded and helps you make sense of your place in the business world.

Before you know it, you will use cash flow as a gauge of your ability to take risks. That knowledge will help you make the kinds of smart decisions that help your company grow and flourish. ■

Ty Freyvogel owns the consulting firm Freyvogel Communications and is author of *It's Not Your Smarts, It's Your Schmooze* and *Seize the Century!* He can be reached through his web site, www.EntrepreneursLab.com.



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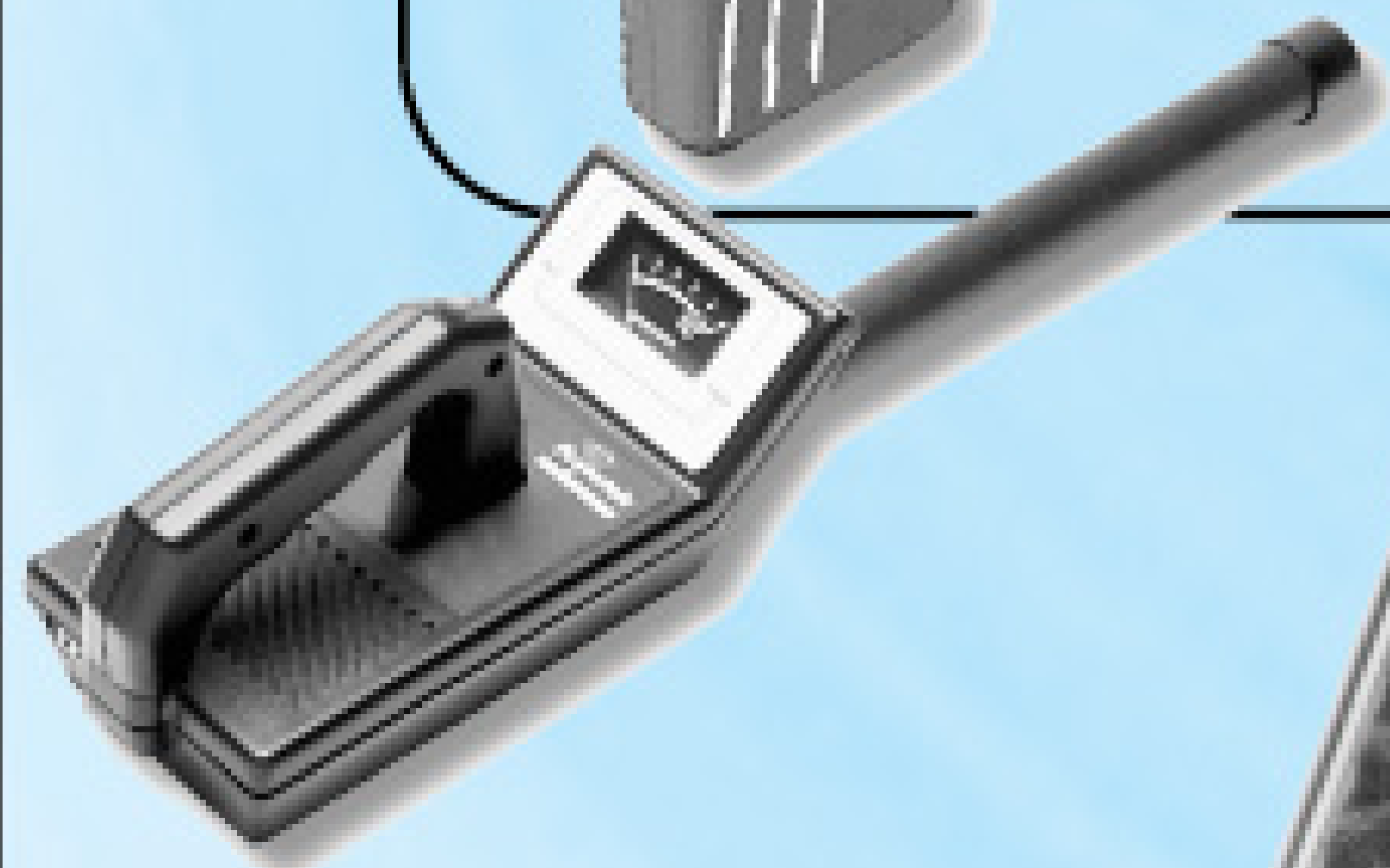
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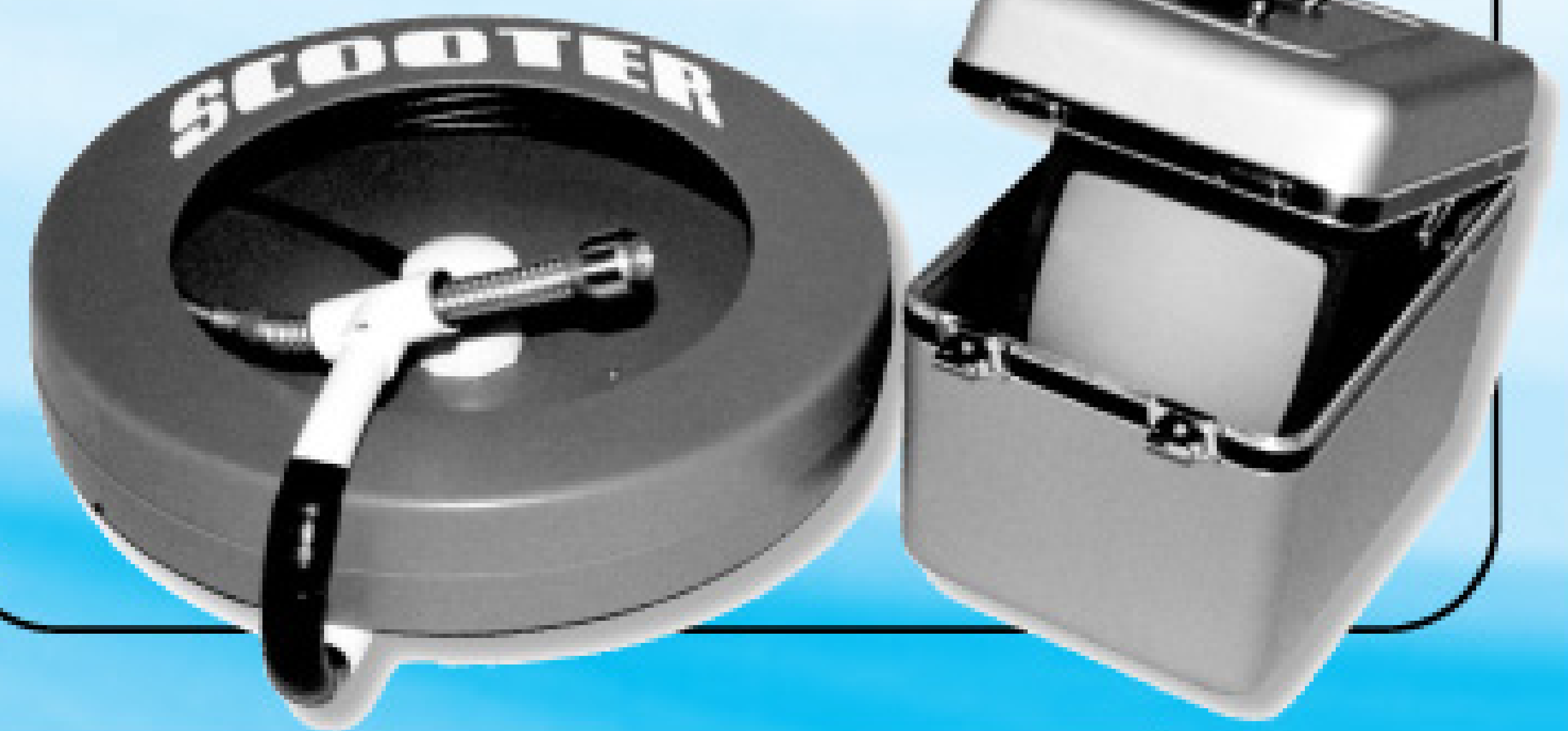
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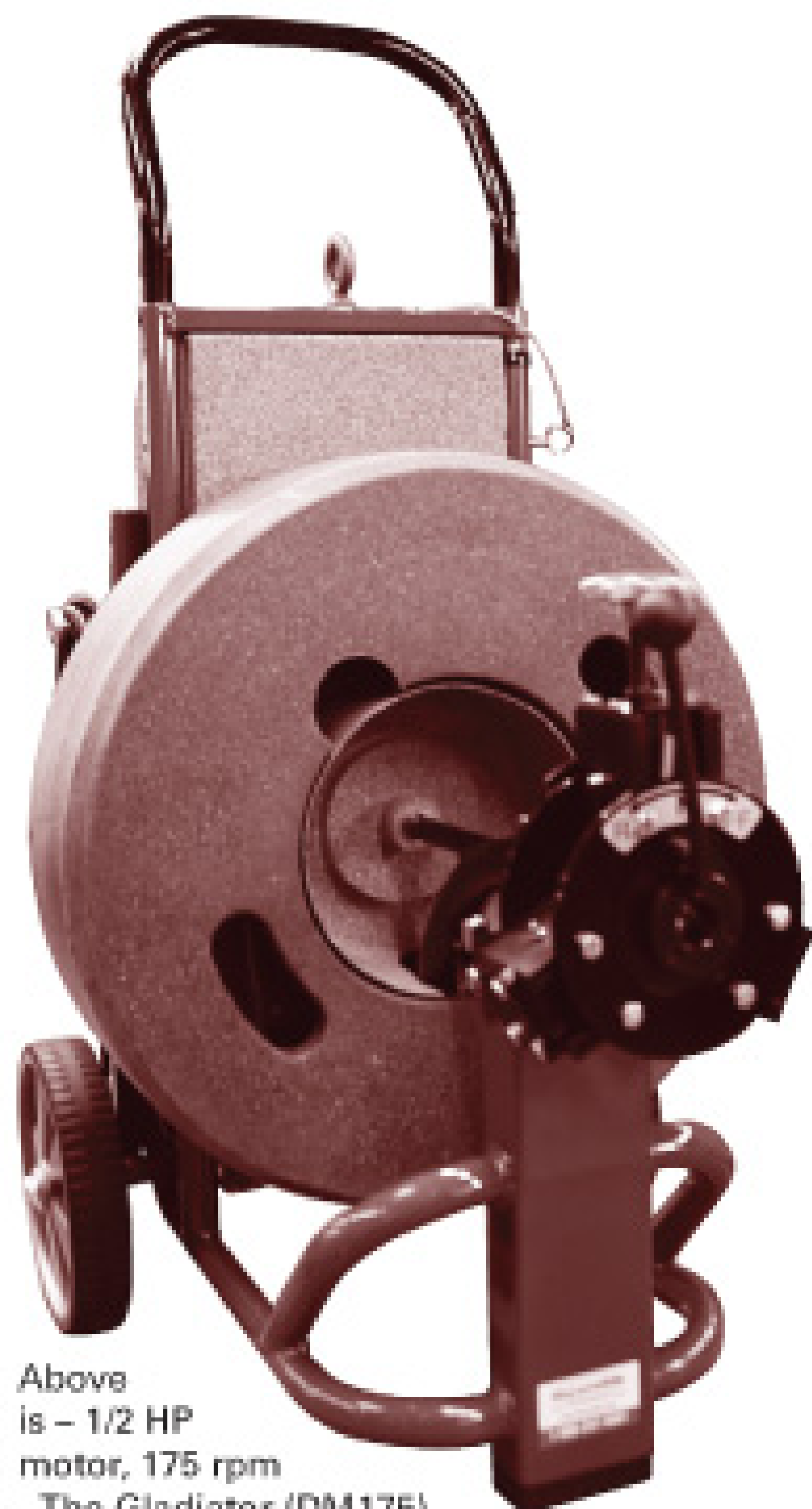
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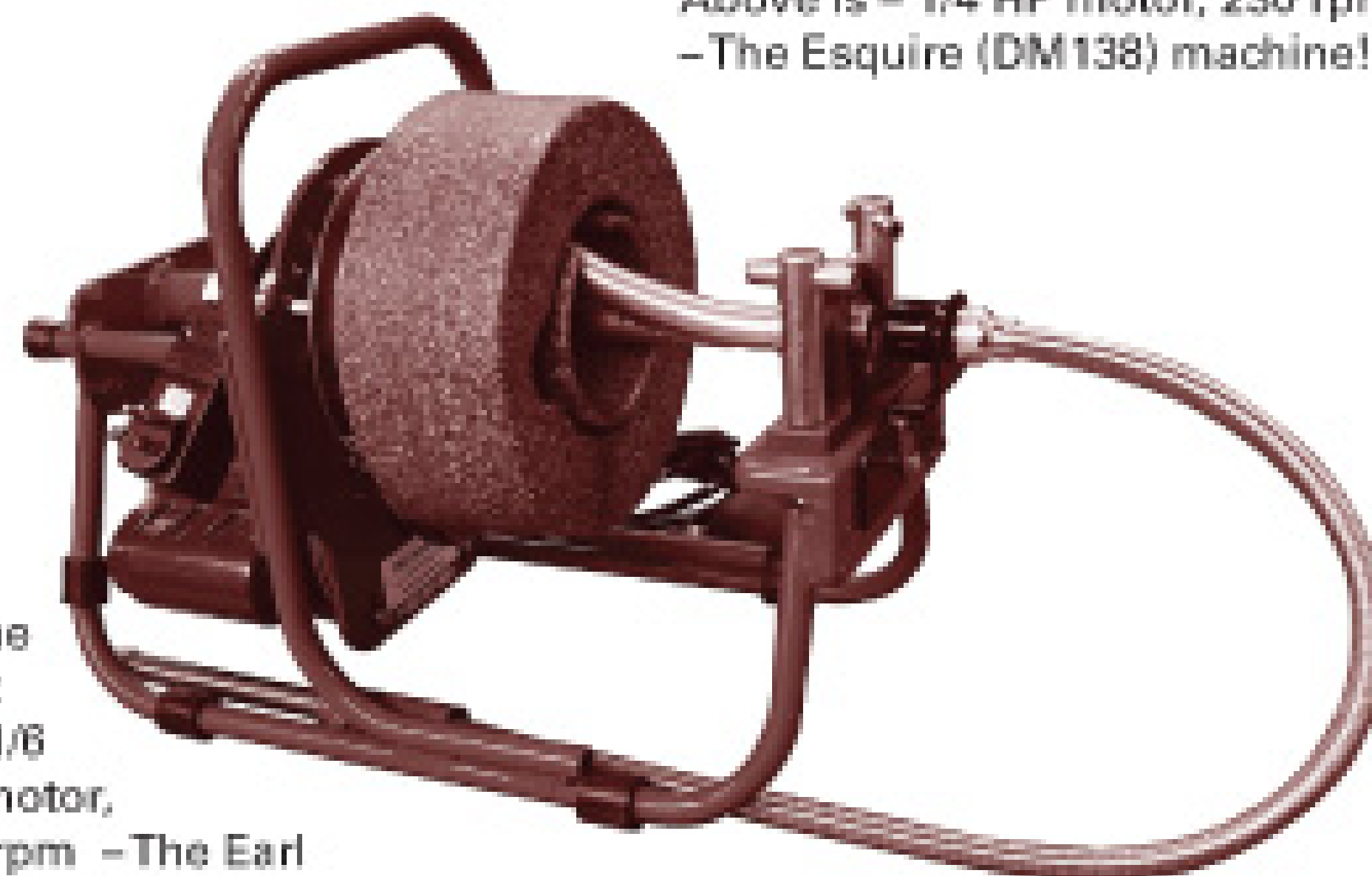
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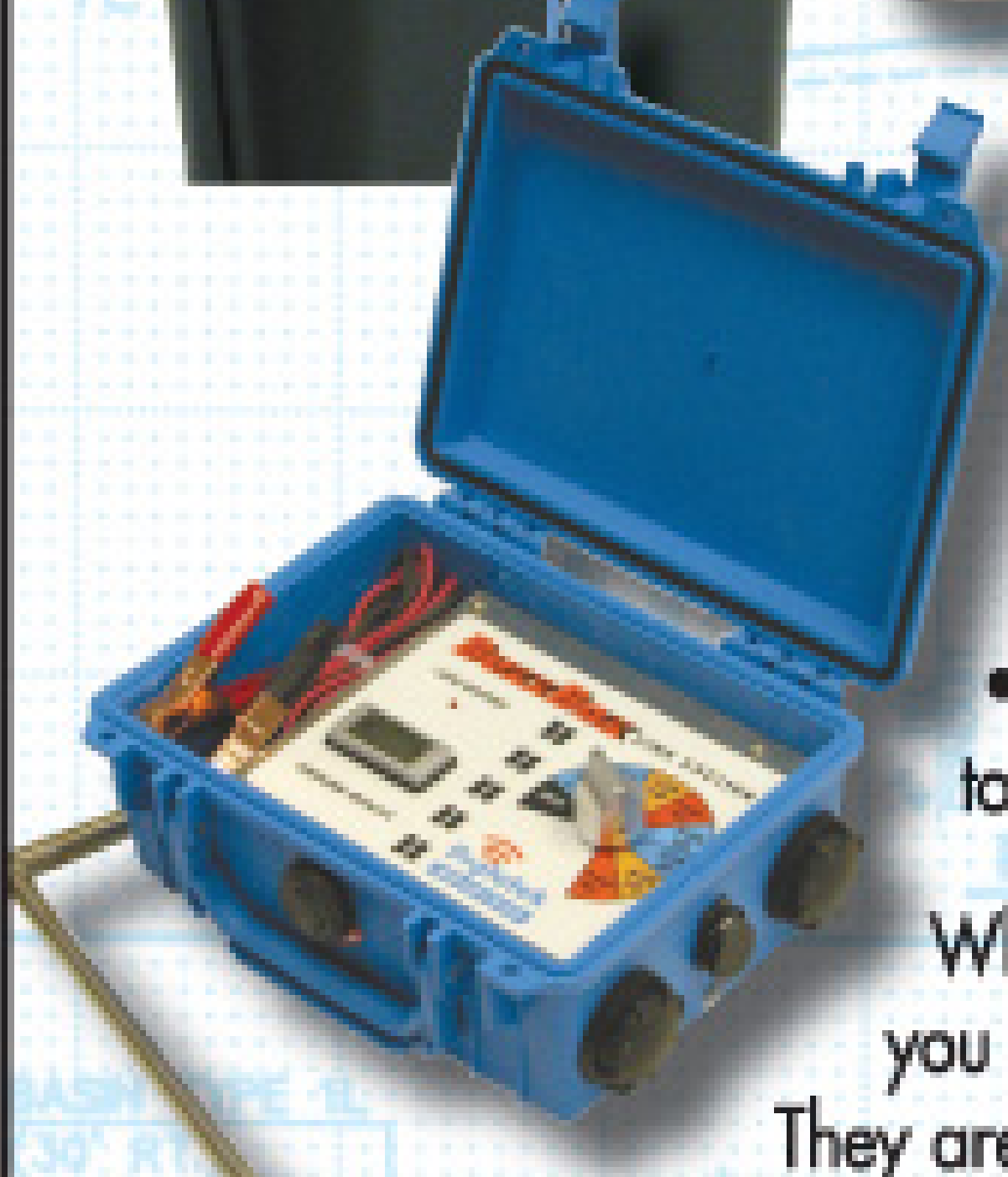
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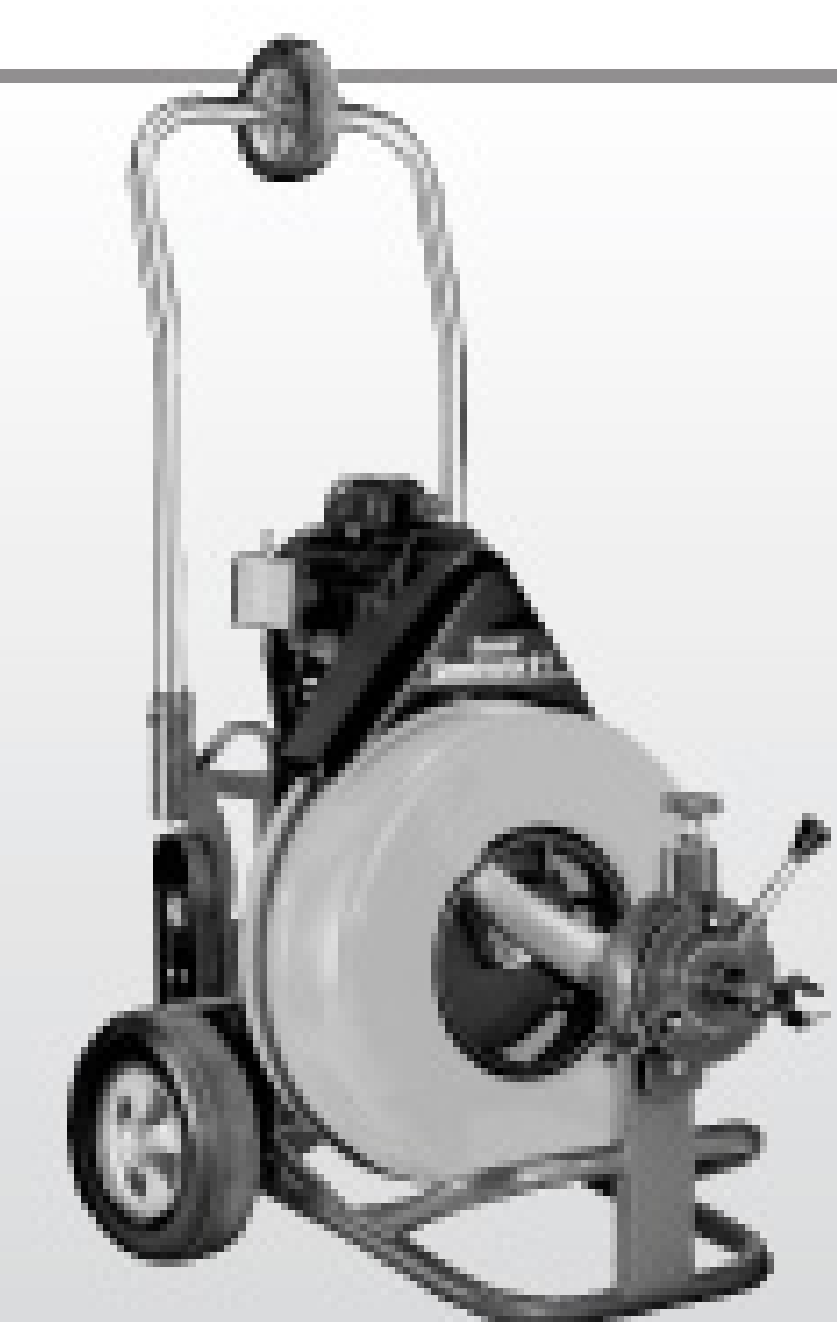


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Change is Good

Here is some practical advice on how you can make your business prosper, even when the market or economy is changing and times are hard

By Anne Houlihan

Many business owners and managers feel their industry is changing rapidly, and they think it's more difficult to do business today than it was just a few years ago.

Certainly, the nightly news is full of stories about industry after industry facing financial setbacks, employee shortages, and increased competition. But just because some companies are struggling to get ahead, the same doesn't have to happen to you.

In fact, if you take a new look at your company and your situation, you may find many opportunities for growth and success. The key is to embrace rather than dread the change that is happening around you.

Let's face it: Change is scary. Life is simpler when everything remains the same: same customers, same orders, same processes, and same routines. But hidden within sameness are mediocrity and complacency — the two enemies of growth and success. If you want to come through a changing economy unscathed, you need to view your company, customers, and processes in a whole new light. To do so, consider these five guidelines for making the most of any economic challenge.

1. Focus on what you already have. Your existing customers are your No. 1 asset. Therefore, survey them and talk to them about their needs. Is there an unmet need you can fulfill? Can you make their business easier to run in some way?

A simple way to find out is simply to ask. You may discover that they have a need for an addi-

tional service you provide. Even though they've been your customer for years, they may not be familiar with all you offer.

Most of the time we sell people the same product or the same service line. In a changing economy, you need to find out what else your customers do or what else they need. Since their industry is likely changing too, they're probably changing the way they do business to stay competitive. You may just be the perfect supplier for their growing needs. But until you ask them, you'll never know.

2. Do a sales analysis on your current customers and clients. Organize your client or customer database by category. Then do a little research to determine:

- Which sectors are still growing in the changing economy?
- Which sectors are down?
- What opportunities do you have with your clients that are growing?
- How can you help clients that are struggling?

3. Examine your infrastructure. Chances are there are many inexpensive ways for you to improve and streamline your company for more efficiency. However, in the past you've simply been too busy to take notice. Now that times are changing, make sure you and your employees are using your proper procedures.

If necessary, have a meeting or training session so everyone is up to date with the efficient systems. Review each department's responsibilities and eliminate tasks that are no longer necessary.

4. Fine-tune your marketing. If you want to attract new customers, and retain current ones, you have to let them know you exist. How is your company's marketing exposure? Do you stand out from the competition? Are your customers aware of your full range of services?

A changing economy is an ideal time to tweak all your marketing messages, including your web site, your brochures, your sales letters, and even your

Anne Houlihan is president of Satori Seal and founder of Golden Key Leadership, where she combines more than 25 years of corporate experience and coaching to help companies of all sizes. She can be reached at www.GoldenKeyLeadership.com or 951/235-5405.



business cards. Granted, during a slow time many companies don't have expendable cash.

Realize, though, that you don't need to do everything yourself or start from scratch. Many business templates are available for low cost or free that can help you improve your marketing messages. These include everything from web site templates to pre-made letterhead designs. Look for and use inexpensive options that are available.

5. Conduct an overall cost analysis. Look at where you can reduce your overhead, thus showing more profit. For example, can your employees negotiate with supply providers for a better price? Can you use some local vendors and

Let's face it: Change is scary. Life is simpler when everything remains the same: same customers, same orders, same processes, and same routines. But hidden within sameness are mediocrity and complacency — the two enemies of growth and success.

virtually eliminate shipping costs? Can you get office supplies from a less expensive source?

Now is the time to challenge what you've always done and discover new ways to save money. Usually when we're busy and doing well, we don't have time for such things. Now is the time to dig deep, question everything, and find those cost savings.

While a changing economy can be a scary time, it's actually a prime time for growth. If you simply look for opportunities, you will find them. So be aware of economic changes and the potential downfalls, but don't make it your reality.

Remember, only you and the decisions you make can create your company's reality. In the end, by simply following the three P's — displaying Positive, Proactive Perseverance — you'll be amazed at how your business can grow. And you'll be glad you said "yes" to opportunity. ■

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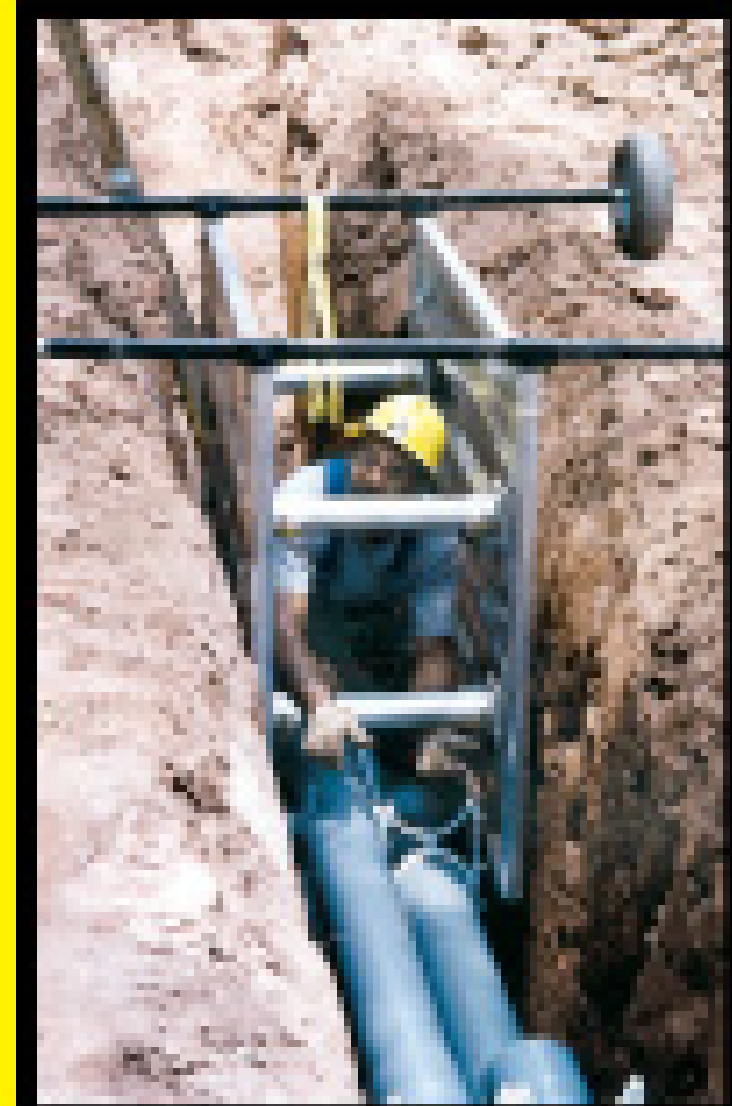
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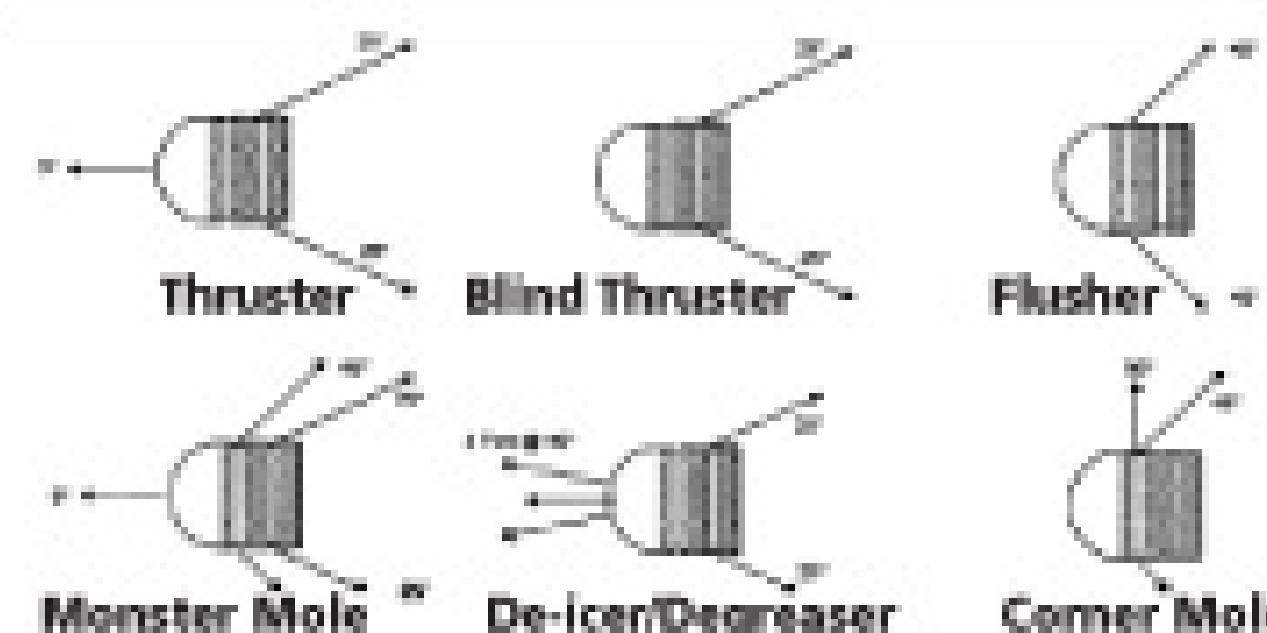


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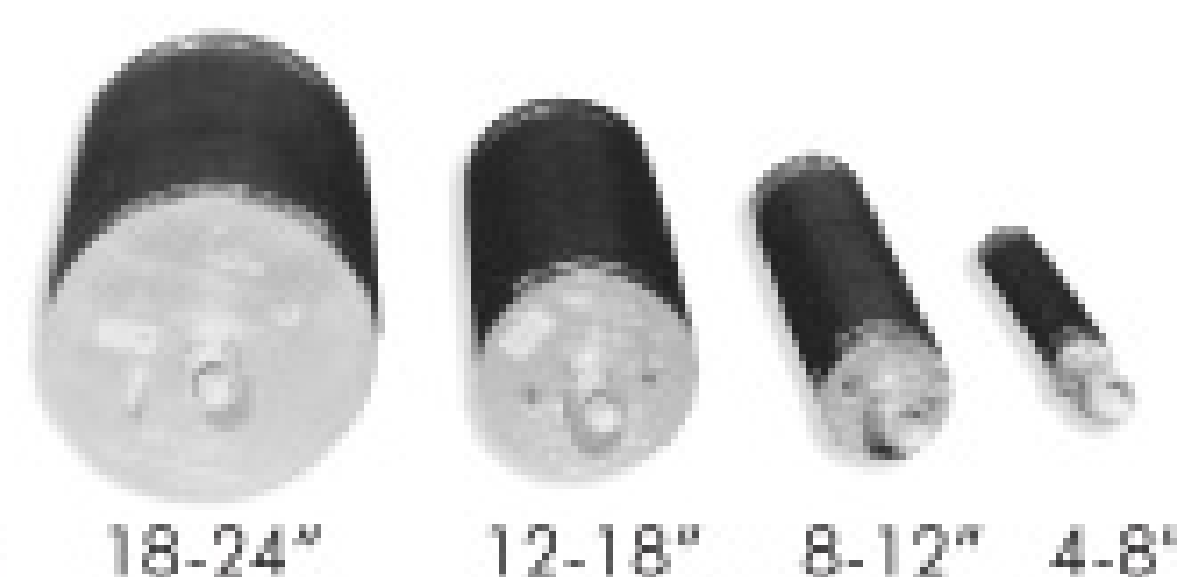
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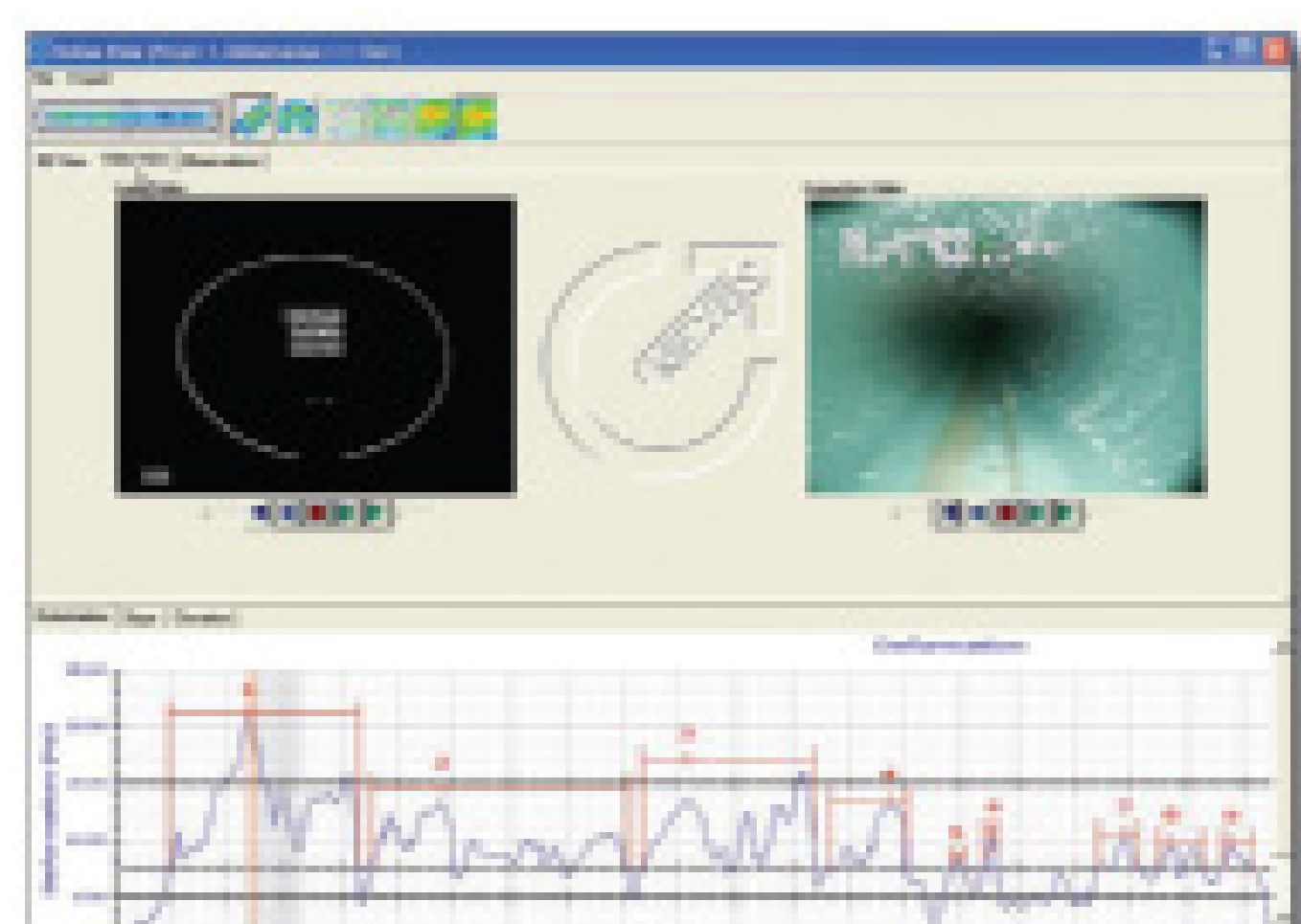
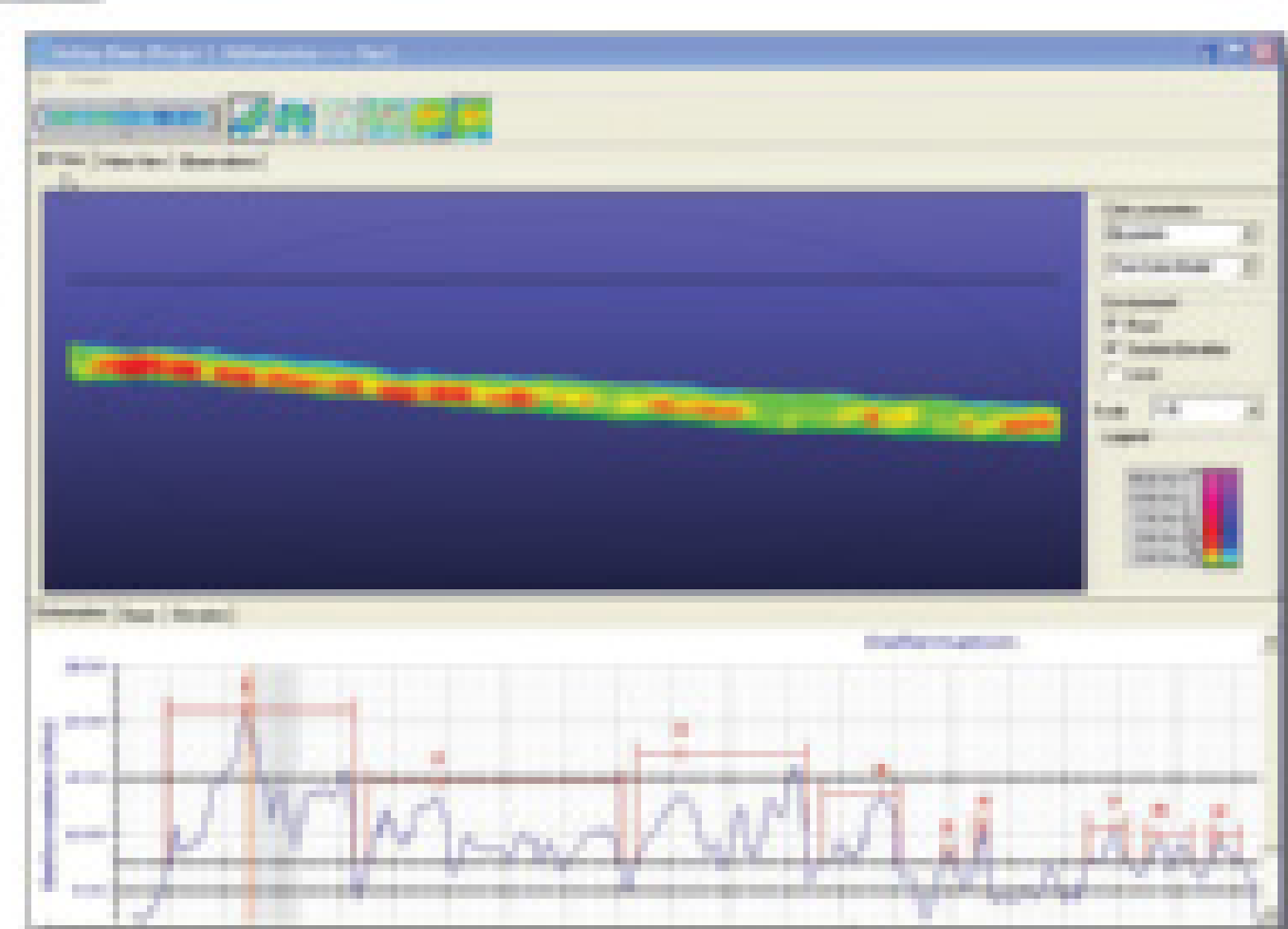
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Mass Sewer & Drain owner Kenny Litalien and technician Barry Nelson prepare a Flexiprobe P330 system from Pearpoint for an inspection. The company has made inroads to its market with an emphasis on inspection and locating. (KarwanPhotos.com)

Subterranean Sleuth

Locating and inspection devices help a suburban Boston contractor solve customer's sewer pipe mysteries and build up profitable lines of business

By Erik Gunn

Kenny Litalien might call himself a drain cleaner, but he's really a gumshoe.

When customers have sewer-line mysteries, Litalien loves puzzling out the answers.

Over the last 10 years he has built a thriving drain-cleaning and inspection business, Mass Sewer & Drain, in suburban Boston. But things really took off about four years ago when he began to offer line locating.

Locating is a challenge that delights, but he shied away from it for years — until he found equipment that he liked. “When you’re wrong, it’s expensive,” he says. A new locating system he bought a few years ago turned him around.

Today, pipe inspection accounts for 10 percent of his work, and locating buried sanitary and storm sewer lines makes up another five percent. Those numbers may seem small, but they mask the bigger significance of the work. Inspection and locating help him level the playing field against larger, brand-name franchises.

“Right now it’s just a way to take care of the customers we already have,” says Litalien. “It keeps the customer onboard. It keeps them from looking for someone else.”

He doesn’t believe it needs to stop there. As his knowledge deepens, and as more of his nine employees learn to use the equipment, Litalien expects inspection and locating to grow by leaps and bounds. He thinks it could easily generate a half-million dollars a year someday.



The Flexiprobe P330 monitor screen shows a pipe inspection in progress.

High school memories

Litalien entered the drain cleaning business while in high school, as an employee of Metro Sewer Service in Woburn, Mass. “My boss used to pick me up after school,” he says. “I quit school in the 11th grade to work for that guy.”

After five years, he went out on his own, starting Mass Sewer & Drain. (Mass for Massachusetts). About five years ago, he bought his old employer and folded that business into Mass Sewer, holding on to

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MASS SEWER & DRAIN WOBURN, MASS.

OWNER: Kenny Litalien
FOUNDED: 1998
SPECIALTIES: Sewer line locating, drain cleaning, pipe inspection
EMPLOYEES: 9
ANNUAL REVENUE: \$1.3 million



both company names to keep the brand recognition Metro Sewer built over its 30-year history.

Inspection has always been part of Litalien's offering. He started with a camera from Scooter Video Inspection Systems, switched to Electric Eel equipment, and more recently turned to the Flexiprobe system from Pearpoint Inc. He likes

“It’s unusual to run from the septic tank in. If I had run from the building out, we would never have seen the open cleanout.”

Kenny Litalien

its image clarity and the built-in sonde, which works well with his Schonstedt locating equipment.

Back when Litalien was a Metro Sewer employee, the business did some locating, and he accompanied work crews as a helper. He wasn't impressed with the hit-and-miss results. “That’s expensive when you’re opening up a main road within a city,” he says.

He credits supplier Jim Fay of Pipe Tools in Pennsauken, N.J., with changing his mind. “I started buying my equipment through him five or six years ago,” Litalien says. His first purchases were cameras. Then he tried Schonstedt locating gear.

Try, try again

Litalien entered the locating business when a local restaurant customer experienced frequent sewer line backups. “Every time it rained heavily, they’d get flooded out,” he says. The solution was to put in a check valve, but the line had to be inspected first to make sure there were no other tie-ins to it, and the location needed to be precise so that he could install the check valve with the minimum of disruption.

“A couple of companies had been in before us trying to locate a 5-inch sanitary sewer leaving the building,” he says. “It was about 25 feet to the city sewer line — just a sidewalk and a street.”

When his first attempt to locate the line failed, Litalien called Fay, who let him borrow a Schonstedt XT512 unit. “The Schonstedt nailed it,” he says. He put off buying the unit, but then had to turn another

customer down because he lacked locating equipment. At that point, he made the purchase.

The XT512 locator stands alongside a full complement of investigative gear. Litalien uses a Pearpoint Flexiprobe P330 camera with a 200-foot reel and a standard 512 Hz sonde in the camera head. He also

uses a drain cleaning machine from Electric Eel Mfg. that uses 8-foot sections of dual cable and 6-foot sections of C cable.

When a camera won't fit, he uses a Prototek sonde, which he nicknamed “the Blue Bullet.” He can attach it to the Electric Eel cable and send it in. “Then we use the Schonstedt to

BUILDING THE TEAM

Mass Sewer & Drain employs nine people, but only two of them, owner Kenny Litalien and employee Joe Martell, do locating and inspection.

“The rest of the guys only do drains,” Litalien says. The reason is simple: training. His video and locating devices are sophisticated and delicate instruments. He wants his crew to know how to use them properly before sending them out and risking damage that could set back his business.

Martell has begun riding along with Litalien to learn more about the locator. Another veteran employee will follow. “These guys need to see five or six camera jobs, and then they'll be able to do it,” Litalien says. “I'll give each one a Pearpoint camera and a Schonstedt locator, and I'll come back to the office to sell the service.” Restaurants are a big source of business, and inspection helps drive sales. “You send the camera down the line, and show the customer a picture of a 4-inch line with a half-inch opening just clogged with grease,” Litalien says. “You go in with a snake; it's like a brand-new pipe.”

Once he has the employees trained, Litalien plans to develop a before-and-after video with scenes like that to help market his inspection and drain-cleaning services. He also has his eye on the home-inspection market.



Kenny Litalien uses a Schonstedt XT512 locator to find the head of the Flexiprobe P330 camera inspection system in a sewer pipe on a Boston street. Inset, Litalien spray-paints the spot after a successful locate.

chase the bullet," he says.

For smaller cleaning jobs — drains smaller than two inches — he uses a Super Vee drain cleaner from General Pipe Cleaners and a Hande drain cleaner from Electric Eel. Both have 35-foot, 3/8 inch cables. He also has a 600-gallon trailer-mounted water jet unit from US Jetting and eight service trucks: two Chevy Astro Vans and six Ford Econoline E-250 vans.

Detective case file

Like any good detective, Litalien has a file full of successful closed cases. Some of the most noteworthy have seen him follow up on problems that have stumped other contractors. Not long ago, the operators of a chain drugstore in Rhode Island had reached the end of their rope. The store had been plagued by an odor and a backed-up sewer line.

“When you shut down a supermarket at night to dig, you can’t be running into unexpected sewer lines.”

Kenny Litalien

Another contractor had already snaked the drains. “They got it clear, but one of the guys got the cable stuck,” Litalien says.

Litalien brought along his Pearpoint camera, but instead of sending it into the line and out of the store from the inside, he went the other way: from the store’s septic tank, through the line, and into the store.

“I saw the camera go past the snake blade and then climb up the wall” inside the pipe,” he says. Then on the video screen he saw the culprit: an uncapped cleanout in the sewer line, buried in the wall.

“I found the cleanout on the

video, but I couldn’t figure out where it was,” he says. Using the camera’s built-in sonde and his Schonstedt locator, Litalien pinpointed the problem, and the store’s contractors were able to solve it. “They opened up the wall and put the cap back on,” he says.

Litalien says his unorthodox approach made the difference. “It’s unusual to run from the septic tank in,” he says. “If I had run from the building out, we would never have seen the open cleanout.”

Success breeds success

Success stories like that one have opened up lots of opportunities for Mass Sewer. On a grocery store remodeling job, Litalien was called in to locate three sanitary sewer lines as precisely as possible. The remodelers were working at night so the store could stay open during the

day, and accuracy was key: “When you shut down a supermarket at night to dig, you can’t be running into unexpected sewer lines,” Litalien says.

Another from the case file: A 25-story high-rise in downtown Boston had a clogged roof drain. “The management company had called in the plumbers before us,” Litalien says. “They were running their snakes to find where the roof drain was clogged.”

One of the men on the job knew of Mass Sewer’s locating abilities. Other plumbers there were skeptical and told Litalien when he arrived that he needn’t bother. But using his sonde and locator, he tracked the



Camera inspection and locating make a powerful pair of services for Mass Sewer & Drain. Owner Kenny Litalien and technician Barry Nelson find the Flexiprobe P330 camera highly portable.

blockage to a spot in the wall in the basement about seven feet up from the bottom floor — behind a concrete wall that had to be opened up for the repair.

The basement room where the repair was done held computer equipment for the building. “It was a major overhaul, and if I was wrong, forget it,” he says.

Yet another job was at New England Baptist Hospital, where general contractors adding a new wing called on Mass Sewer as a subcontractor. The project included new roof drains. Mass Sewer had to inspect the storm sewer running from the hospital to the street and locate all of catch basins. The hospital’s hilltop location added to the challenge.

“It was probably the hardest locator job I’ve ever had to do,” Litalien says. “We could hardly walk on the hill, it was so muddy.” Running the camera through from inside the building out to the main line, Litalien identified the locations of three catch basins and used the camera to discover some bad tie-ins and broken pipe. “Once I found them with the camera, we had to locate them so they would know where to dig,” he says.

That job pushed the equipment to its limits. “You can locate anything as long as it’s not too deep — 12 feet or so,” Litalien says. On the hospital job some of the lines were as far as 15 to 18 feet underground. “We still located them, but it was very, very hard because the signal was so faint.”

Missing ring

The locating story Litalien likes best is the mystery of the missing

diamond ring. A long-time residential customer in Lexington, Mass., had dropped the ring down a toilet. Litalien put his camera into the sewer line from behind the house.

“Just as we were coming into the basement, there it was,” he says. Workers established the exact point, cut open the hardwood floor, and extracted the ring from the line. The customer called a local TV station, and a news crew filmed a re-enactment.

Publicity like that is free — and priceless. And with stories like that to tell, Litalien is looking ahead to the day when all that sophisticated gear uncovers a lot more business as expertly as it detects sewer lines and clogs. ■

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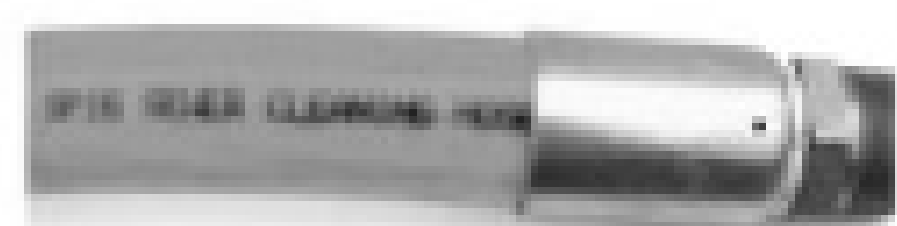
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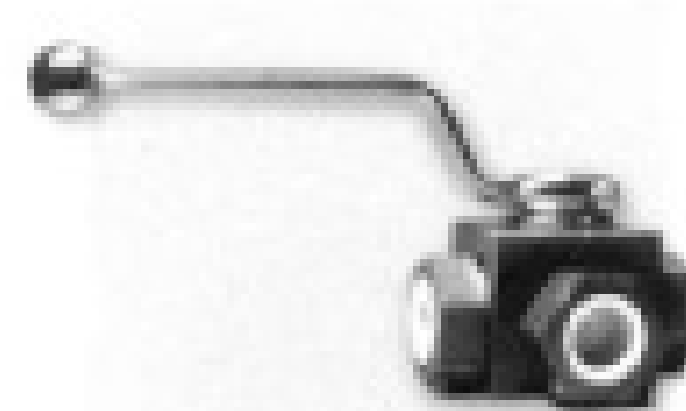
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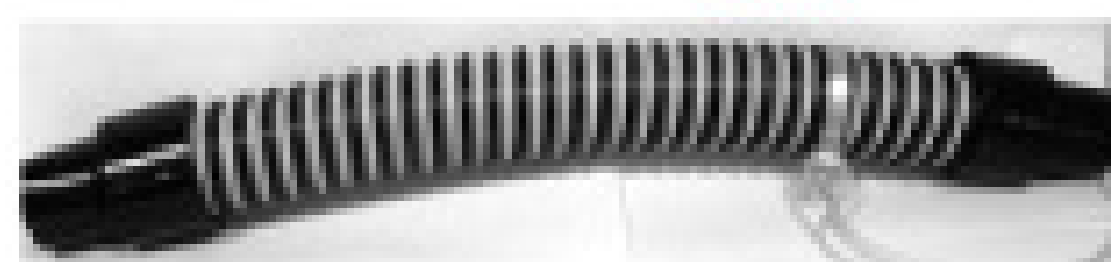
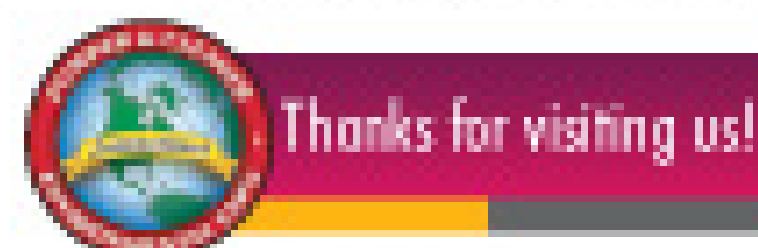
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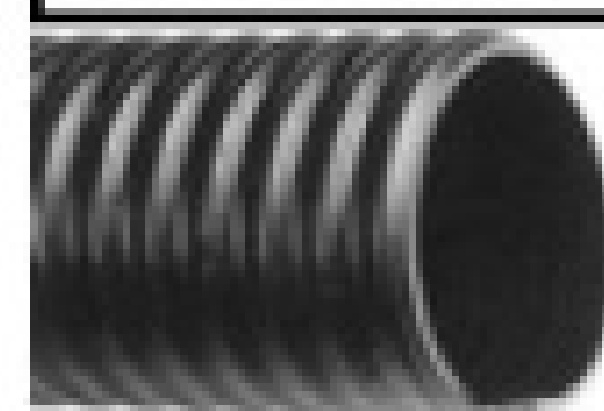
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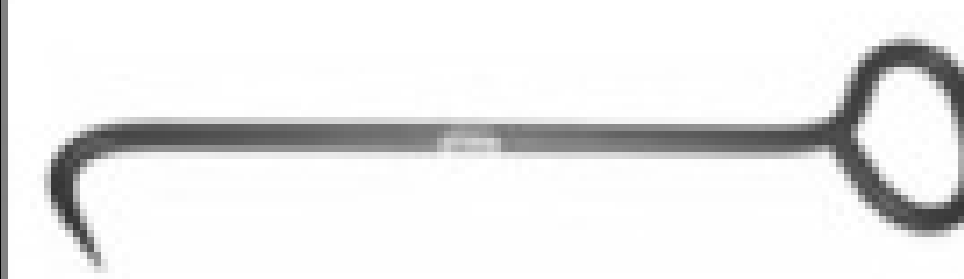
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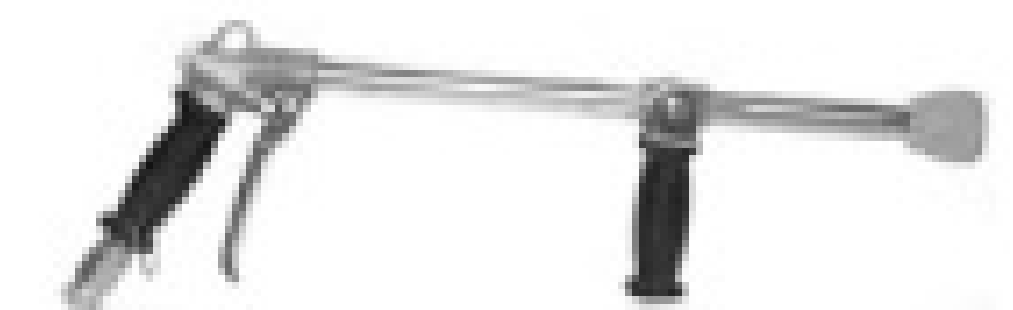
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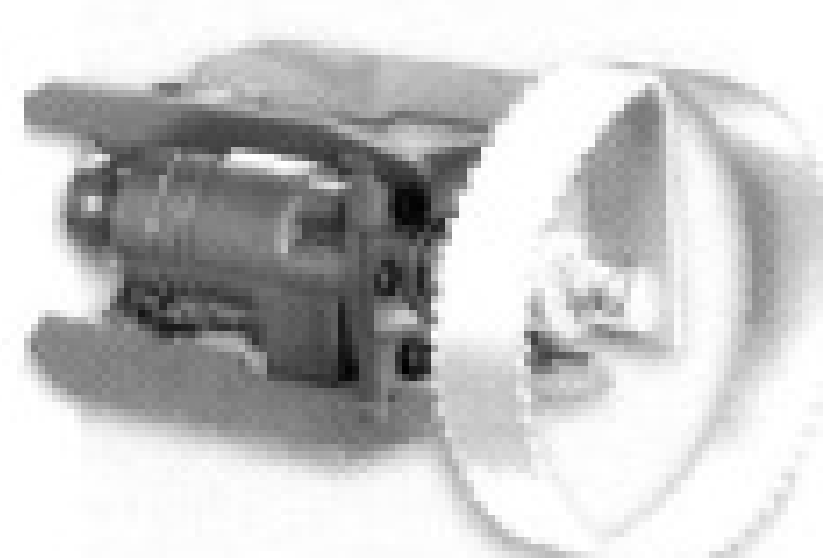
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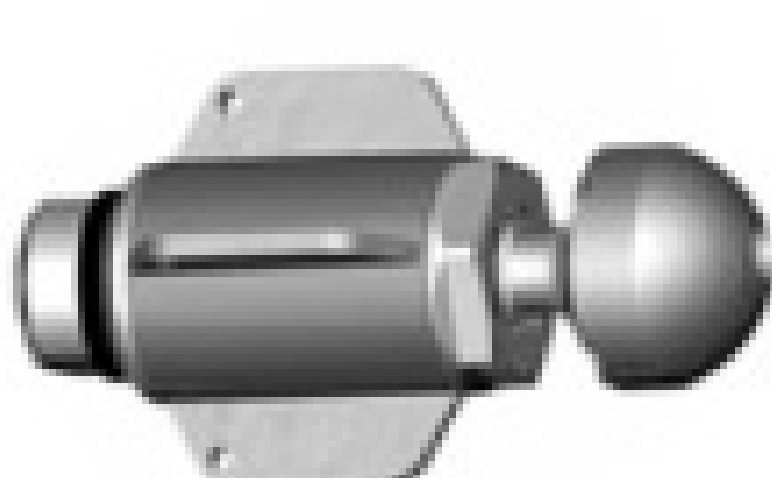
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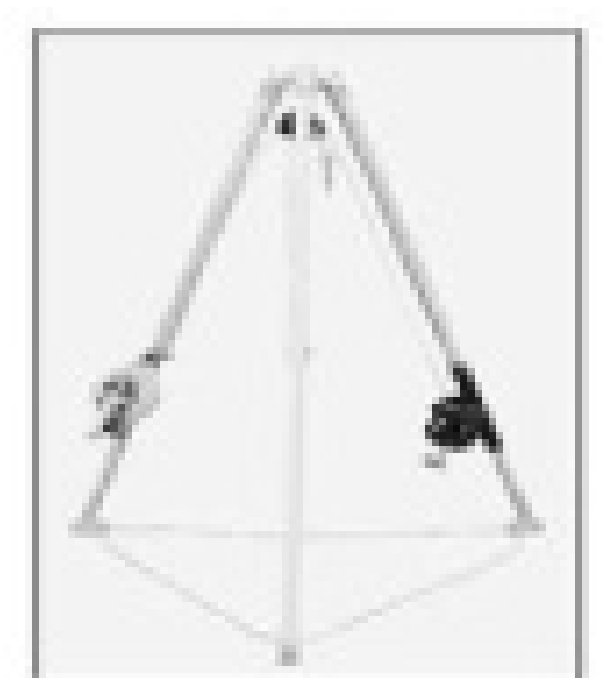
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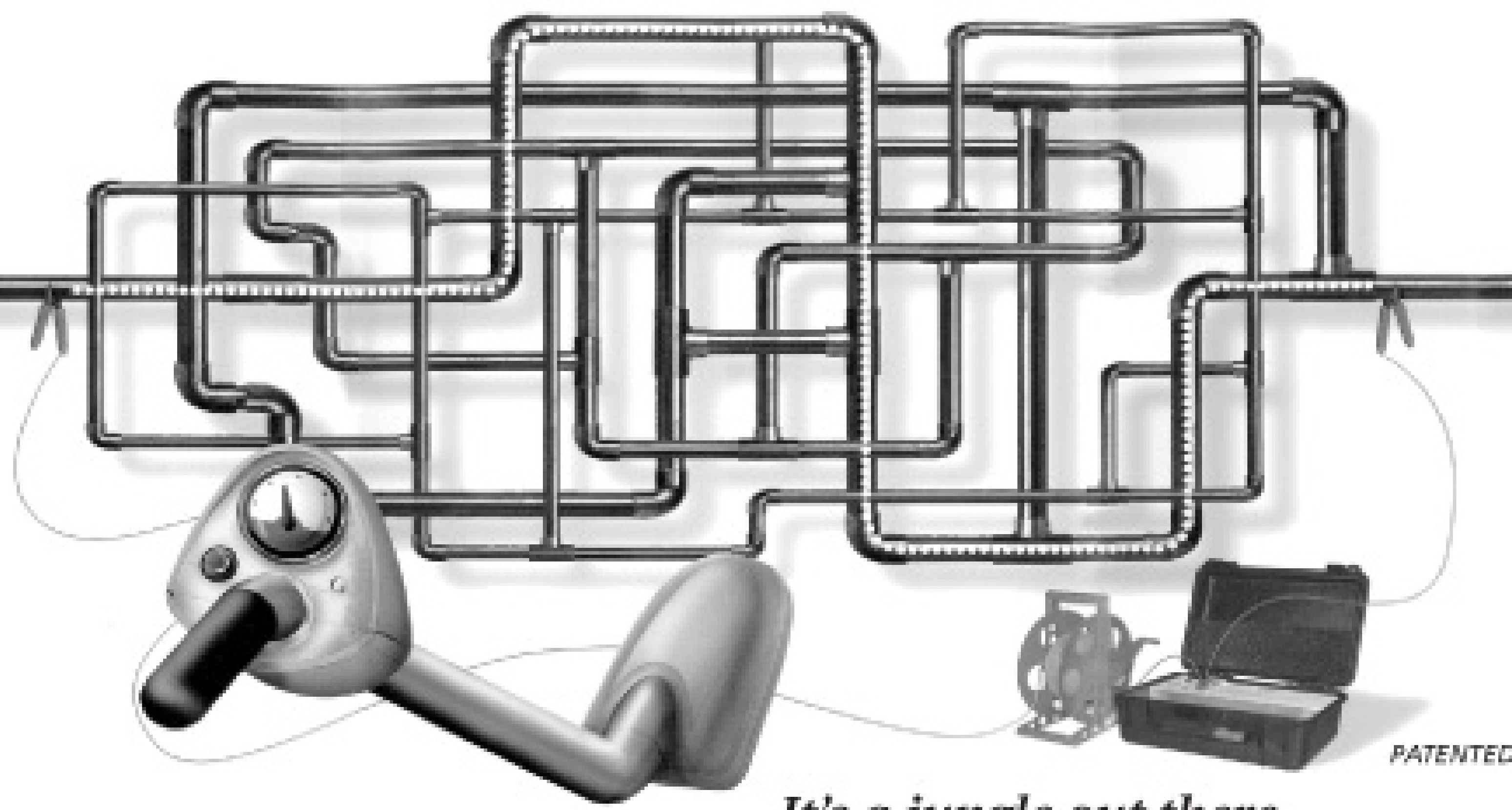
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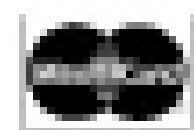


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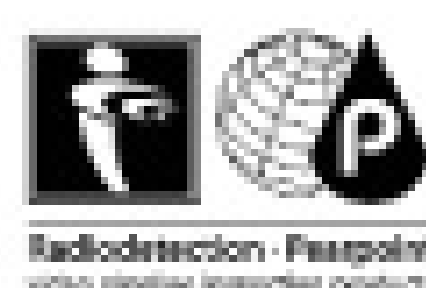
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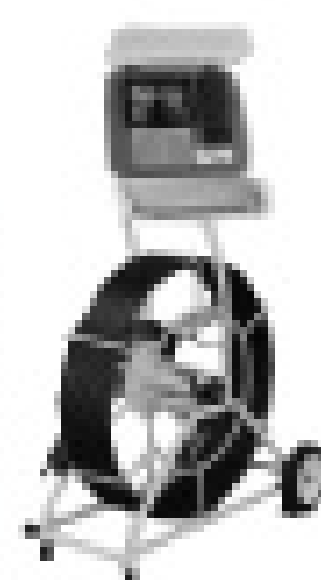
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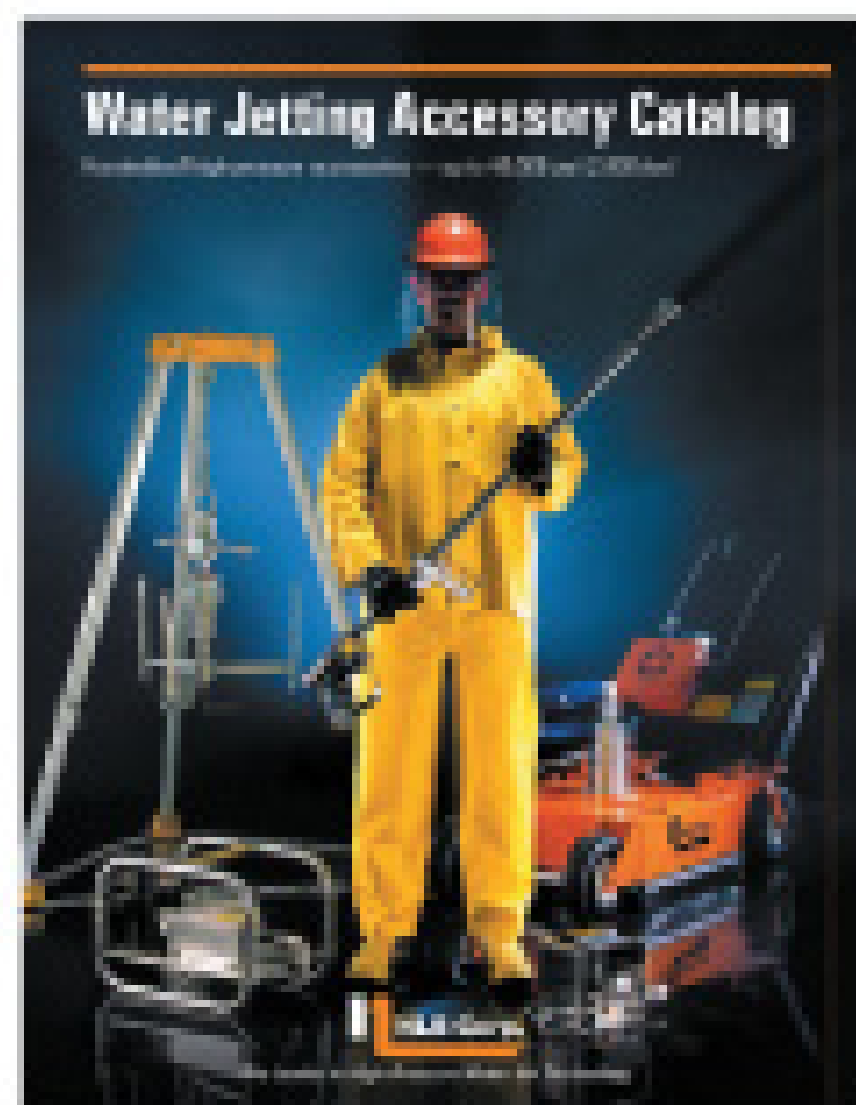


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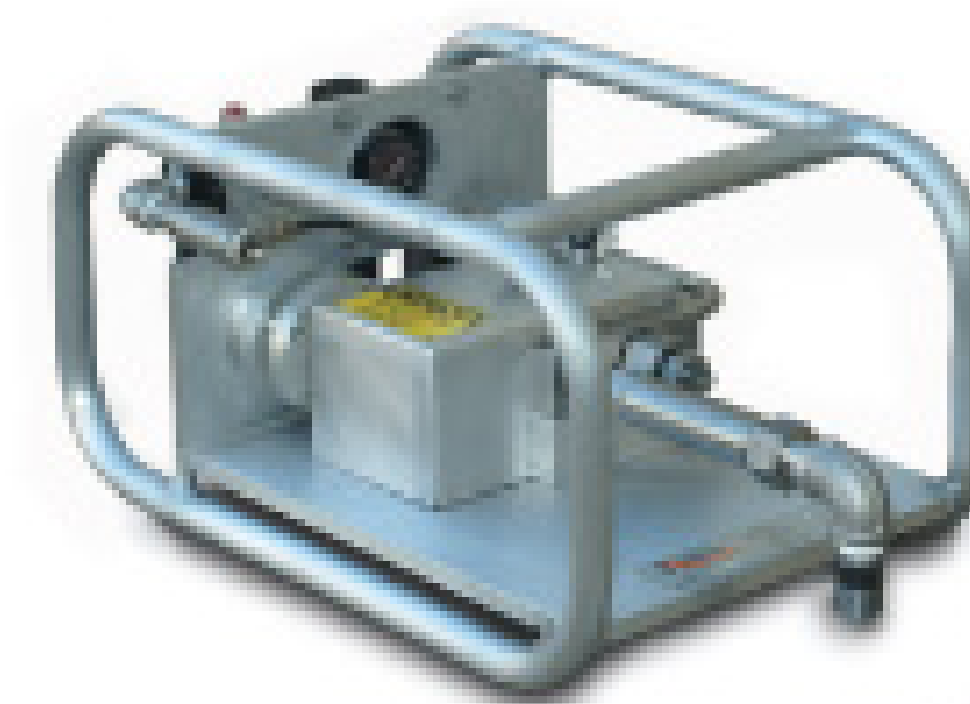
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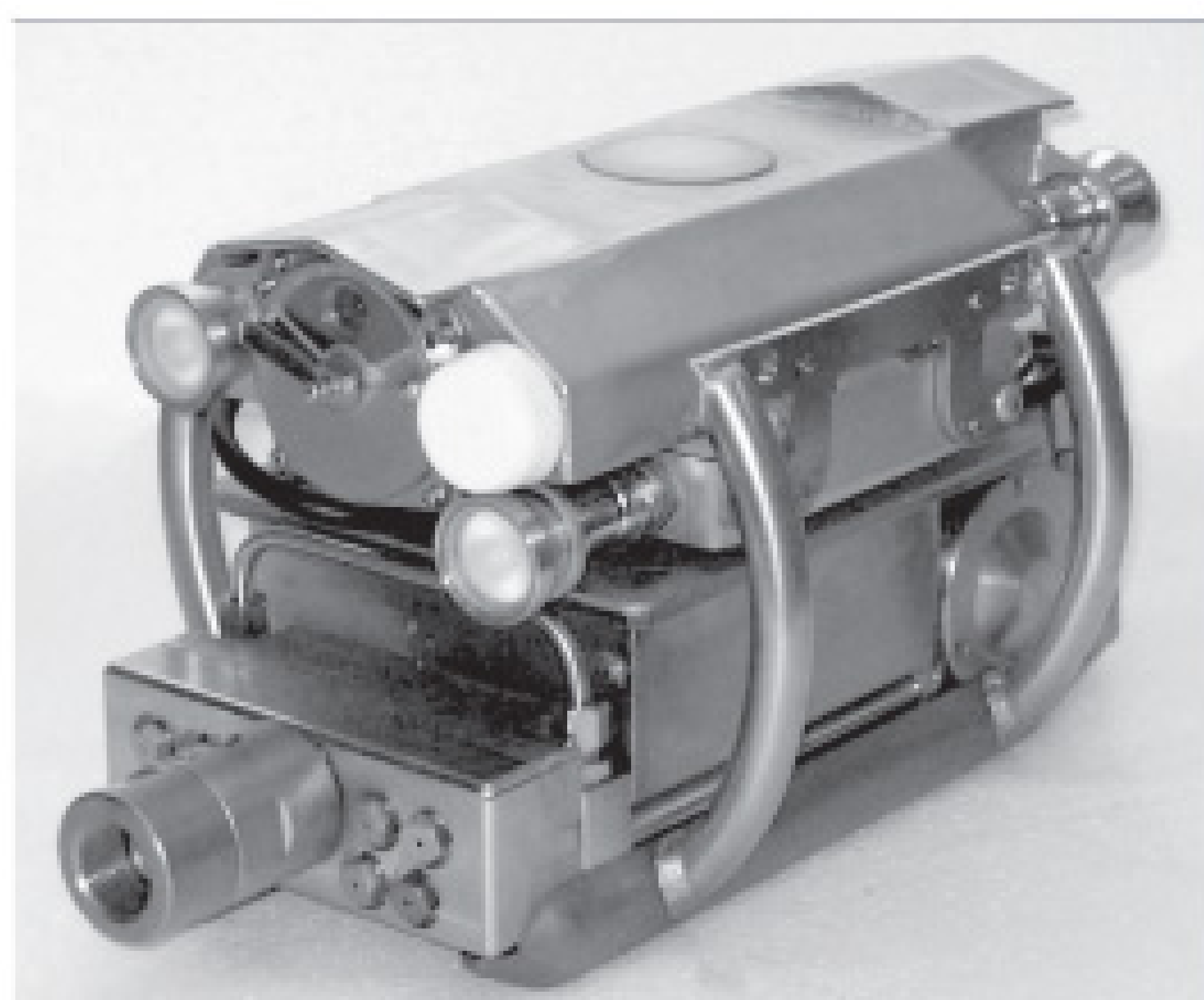
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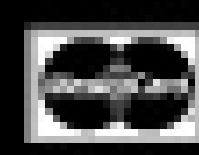
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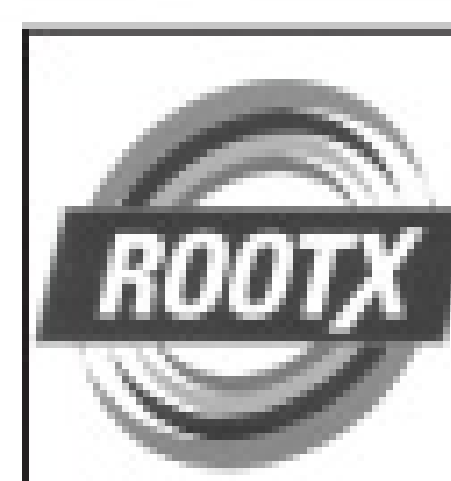


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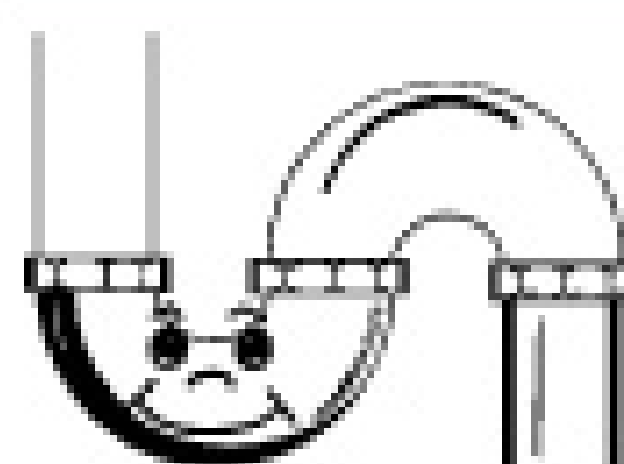
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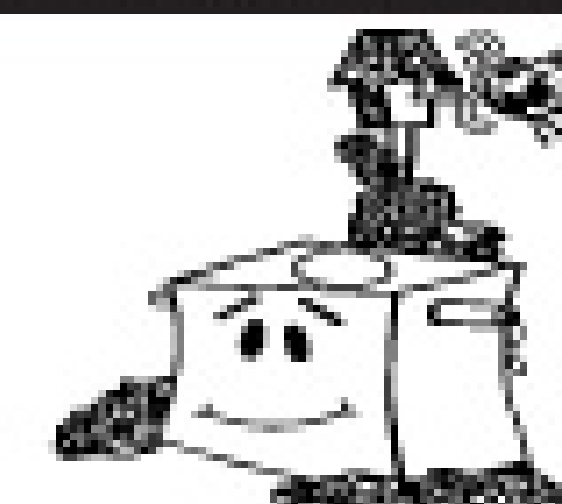
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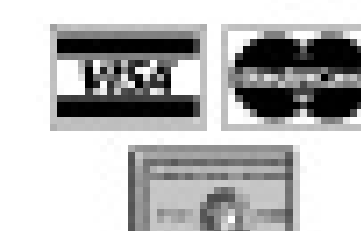
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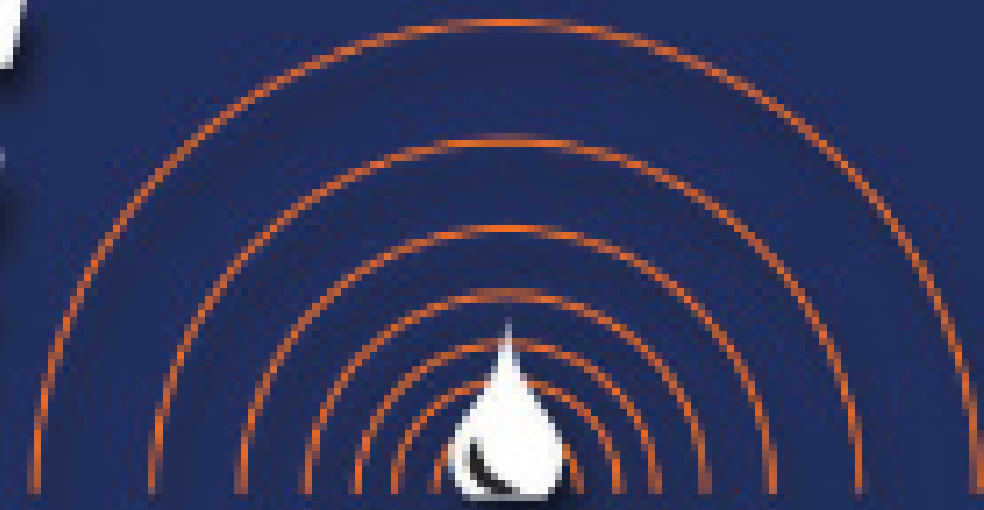


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Mr. Rooter Plumbing of St. Croix Valley is located 15 miles from the Minnesota border and serves three counties in western Wisconsin and one in eastern Minnesota. Technician Kim Hudson and co-owner Allen Lewerer are shown on a remote job site. (Photography by Casey Lake)



New Name, Same Face

A local plumber finds that taking on a national drain cleaning franchise requires adjustments — in equipment, pricing, and approaches to dealing with customers

By Erik Gunn

Talk about shifting gears. Allen Lewerer grew up in the western Wisconsin community where he still lives and works, but when he opened his shop a year ago he was the new guy in town.

After nearly three decades of doing mostly new construction plumbing, he was taking on a new niche: service plumbing. And accustomed to working just for his father in a small, local shop, he now finds himself part of a national operation as a Mr. Rooter affiliate. He has no regrets about any of it.

Lewerer, 46, operates Mr. Rooter of St. Croix Valley out of New Richmond, Wis., serving three counties in Wisconsin and one in eastern Minnesota. He is optimistic about the road ahead, and he has already begun mapping out new directions for his business.

"Pretty much the future is completely open right now," he says.

Construction to service

The Mr. Rooter business opened in 2006, but it grew out of the long-

time plumbing business owned by his father, Dave Lewerer. Richmond Plumbing and Heating Inc. has been in business for more than 30 years, and Al has worked for the company since he finished high school 28 years ago.

Richmond Plumbing has focused on new home plumbing for most of its history. "My dad did a lot of the service work himself," Al Lewerer says. "Occasionally he'd have me do the remodeling and other service work, too." But as father and son

looked at the changing landscape, they noticed something.

"We saw the new construction field being competitive," the younger Lewerer says. "This area needed a plumbing service company. We saw the opportunities Mr. Rooter offered."

So they obtained franchise rights for Mr. Rooter in the area and set up the new company with Al Lewerer in charge. Located 15 miles from the Minnesota border and 40 miles from the Twin Cities, the company is one of three Mr. Rooter franchises that

touch the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

There were plenty of changes to get used to. One was being part of a large franchise organization. While that took a little getting used to, Lewerer mostly appreciates the strength and support in numbers. "My dad started as a plumber in the Twin Cities area and learned a lot of things on his own," Lewerer says. The Mr. Rooter network offers plenty of support, available online and on demand.

"Usually I'm checking it daily just

PROFILE

MR. ROOTER PLUMBING OF ST. CROIX VALLEY NEW RICHMOND, WIS.

OWNERS:	Allen and Roxy Lewerer, David and Evelyn Lewerer
FOUNDED:	2006
SERVICE AREA:	Four counties
EMPLOYEES:	6
SPECIALTIES:	Drain cleaning, video inspection
WEB SITE:	www.mrrooter.com/StCroixValley



“We saw the new construction field being competitive. This area needed a plumbing service company.”

Al Lewerer

to see if anyone’s posting a question that I could learn from,” he says. “When you’re pulling from over 225 franchises in the United States and Canada, that helps tremendously.”

Making adjustments

Customers and prospects had to adjust, too: They needed to know that behind the new corporate name was a familiar local face. “People are hesitant when there’s a new company,” Lewerer says. “Once they realize who we are, and they find out we are mainly a family-run business, that puts them quite a bit at ease.”

Still another adjustment was adapting to the Mr. Rooter standard of flat-rate pricing. “New construction is mainly bidding,” Lewerer says. “Flat rate was a whole new concept. It’s been a learning curve, but I see the value in it.” Flat rates were mostly a new idea around the area, but customers seemed to like it.

“It makes the customer feel a lot more at ease when you go over everything, diagnose the problem and tell how much it’s going to cost them,” Lewerer says.

Lewerer’s part of the world presents some distinctive plumbing challenges. They include working in older homes with older pipes and tree-root intrusion and, in winter, frozen water and sewer lines. That’s part of what has Lewerer thinking about the future.

“One of my hopes in the next couple of years is to take on a pipe relining system,” he says. “I’ve talked to a lot of city utility workers, and they’re all very interested in that type of an idea, because they’re seeing a need for it.” In the meantime, Lewerer has plenty to do. His service fleet includes a pair of Ford E-350 Super Duty vans with box bodies.

His inspection and cleaning tools include a MyTana M81 mainline machine, an M661 drain machine, and an M20 jetter that delivers 1,500 psi. Cameras include a MyTana color mainline unit and a RIDGID SeeSnake Micro unit.

“I’m a firm believer in, once you cable it, send a video down the pipe to inspect it,” Lewerer says.

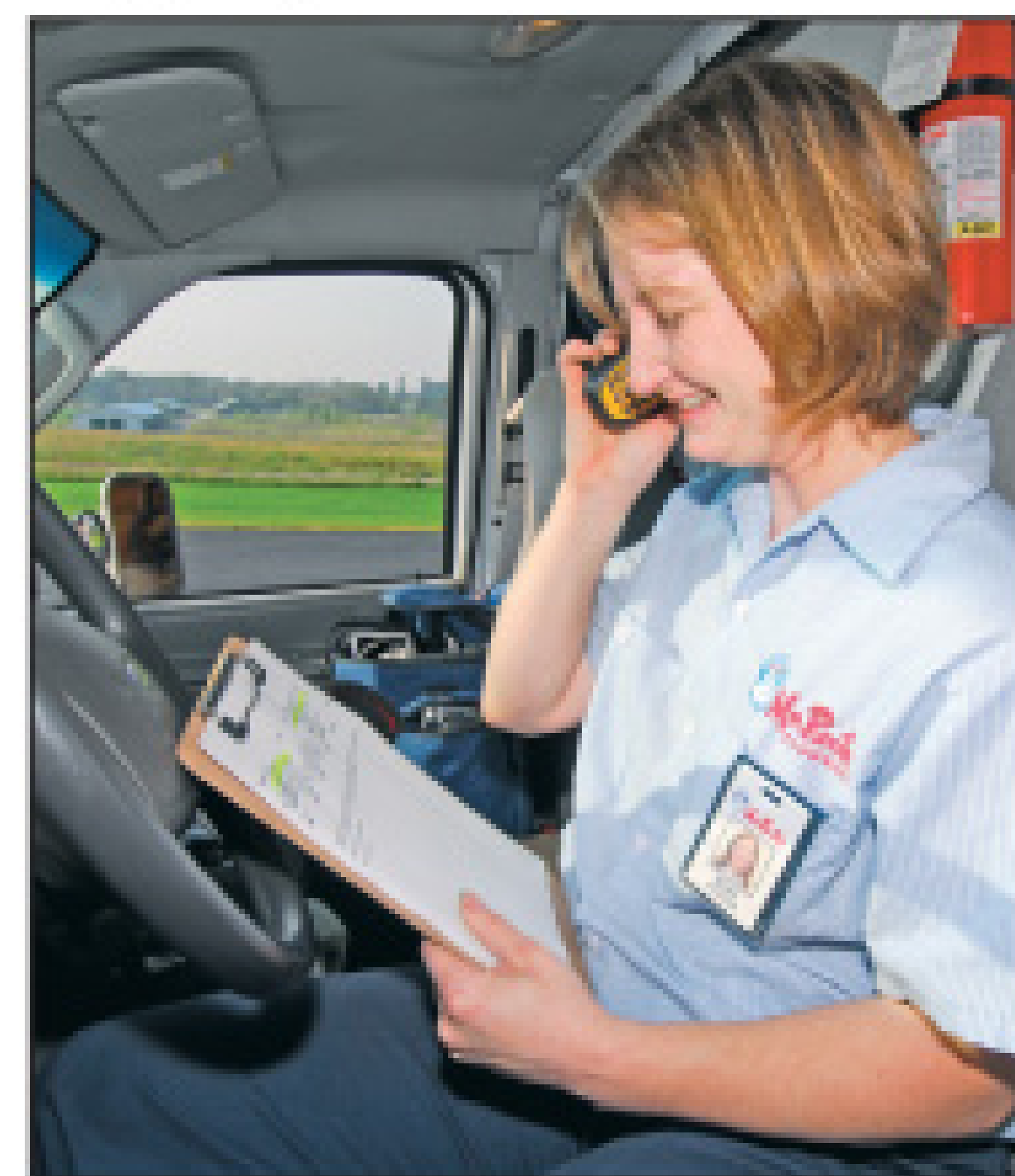
The location of MyTana Manufacturing Company Inc. in nearby

St. Paul is one reason Lewerer likes that company’s products. “If something breaks down, we don’t have the time delay of having to ship it,” he says. “We can drive it over there and pick it up.”

Computer savvy

A computer hobbyist, Lewerer has built the computers for his business. He does digital video editing on the computer, and he brought that skill to his work. “I’m recording most of the sewer camera jobs I do on VHS tape,” he says. “When customers ask for a copy, I digitize it in the computer and actually burn it on

Kim Hudson uses two-way communication to check back with the office after completing a work order.



Allen Lewerer opened Mr. Rooter of St. Croix Valley in 2006. The company grew out of the longtime family business, Richmond Plumbing and Heating Inc., founded by Al’s dad, Dave Lewerer, more than 30 years ago. Family members pictured are (from left) Allen’s step-daughter Kim Hudson, his wife, Roxy, Al, his mother, Evelyn, his father, Dave, and step-daughter Sally Vruno.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Al Lewerer got into the plumbing trade through his father, Dave, and now he is passing it down to the next generation.

Al’s wife, Roxy, handles clerical duties part time for Mr. Rooter Plumbing of St. Croix Valley. His youngest step-daughter, Sally Vruno, fields customer calls and schedules visits as a customer service representative. His other step-daughter, Kim Hudson, is completing her fourth year of apprenticeship to become a licensed plumber. Even his father helps out on some of the service calls.

Lewerer and Roxy attended the 2007 Pumper & Cleaner Expo in Nashville. Having their daughters in charge in their absence made that easier. “Kim took all the calls the week we were gone,” Lewerer says.

As the business grows, and as Lewerer gets ready to slow down, he hopes to pass the business on to the next generation. “Working with family can be rewarding,” he says. “You see your family members growing in their knowledge and their skills, and you know it’s helping them in their life.”

Located 40 miles from the Twin Cities, Mr. Rooter of St. Croix Valley can drop off or pick up equipment from MyTana Manufacturing Company Inc. in St. Paul.

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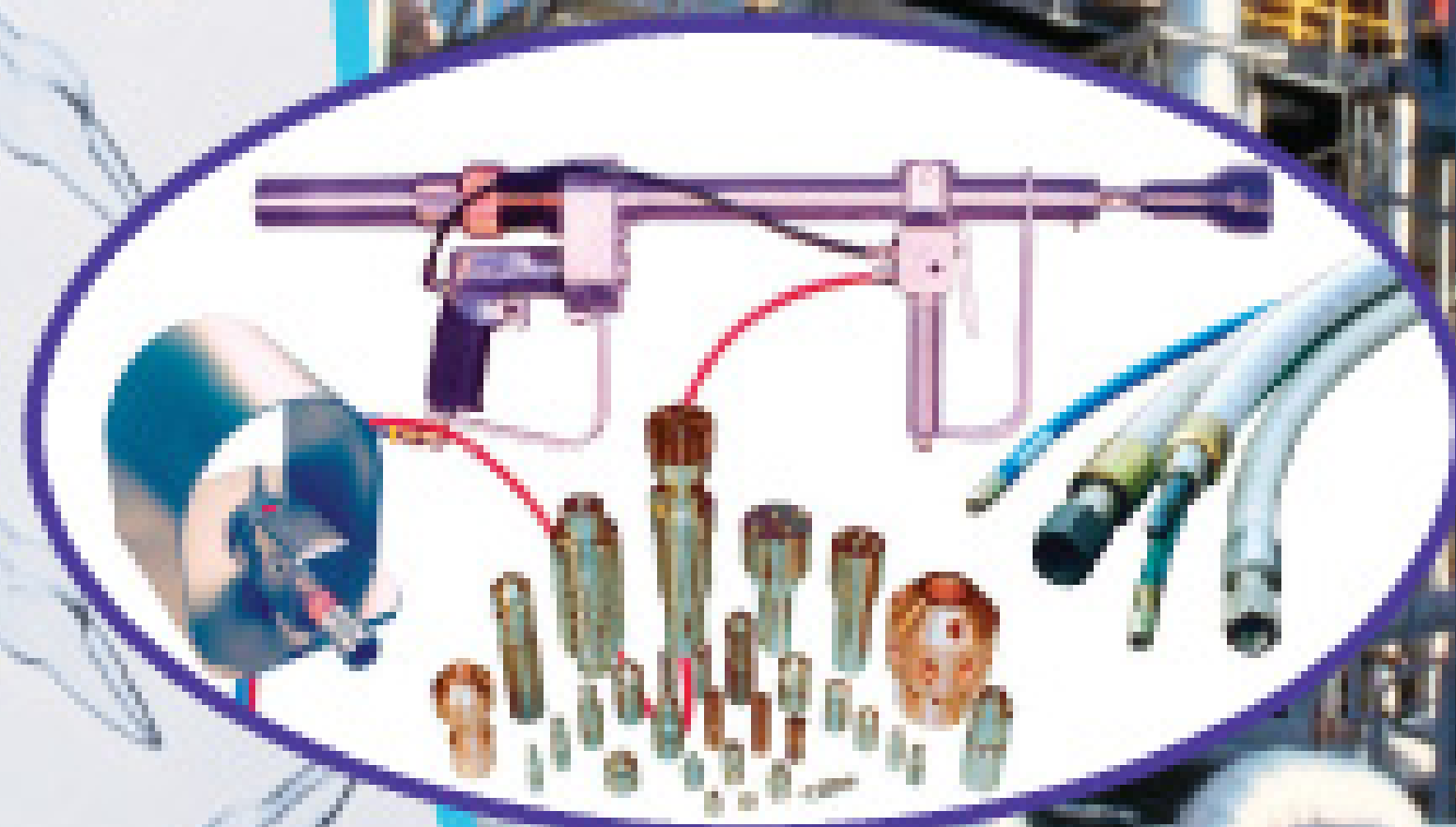
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to a DVD."

When he inspected a sewer line for a local church, he produced a DVD and handed it over "so their board of directors could see how I wanted to handle it," Lewerer says. He dubbed a narration on the recording and branded it with a Mr. Rooter logo.

Video work helps customers not just at the moment but in the future, he reasons. On one call, the camera revealed cracks in a customer's sewer line from invading tree roots near where the line tied into the city sewer main. "I put it on a DVD and mailed it to them so they could take it to the city utility department and ask who is responsible," he says. "Now they can plan for their future and how to deal with it."

He also collects still images from jobs to use in training employees. "I carry a digital still camera with me in my diagnostic bag," Lewerer says. "I take pictures of things that are broken or have gone wrong to build up a library. When I have future employees, I can show them pictures of the problems."

Always on call

Tied in with the new flat-rate pricing structure is the principle of around-the-clock service. "Mr. Rooter is a 24/7 company, with the idea of making it more convenient for the homeowner," Lewerer says.

He finds his customers like that as well. "They don't have to take off of work in the middle of the day," he says. "If it's in the evening, it's in the

"You're always in the business mode as an owner because you're always thinking about it. How you would handle a situation. How you would handle something so it's fair to the customer."

Al Lewerer

evening, and there's no extra charge." Of course, that means demands on his time. "I went out Christmas Eve and I went out New Year's Eve for main lines that were plugged," he says. "I knew I made their holiday better because I solved the problem for them."

Just how many hours a week does he spend on the business? Lewerer chuckles at the question. "I've been afraid to add them up, actually," he confesses. "You're always in the business mode as an owner because you're always thinking about it. How you would handle a situation. How you would handle something so it's fair to the customer."

Solving problems is a major reason he went into the business. "Mainly I'm a hands-on type of person," Lewerer says. "I like to be able to work with my hands, and I like to help people. I like mechanical things and I like trouble-shooting things. I feel good when I can solve problems. It seems like a natural fit." ■



Allen Lewerer takes step-by-step photos on jobsites. The photos are used during training to show new technicians how a job should be done. Here, he downloads photos from his camera to his computer. A computer hobbyist, Lewerer built and maintains all the computers in his office.

MORE INFO:

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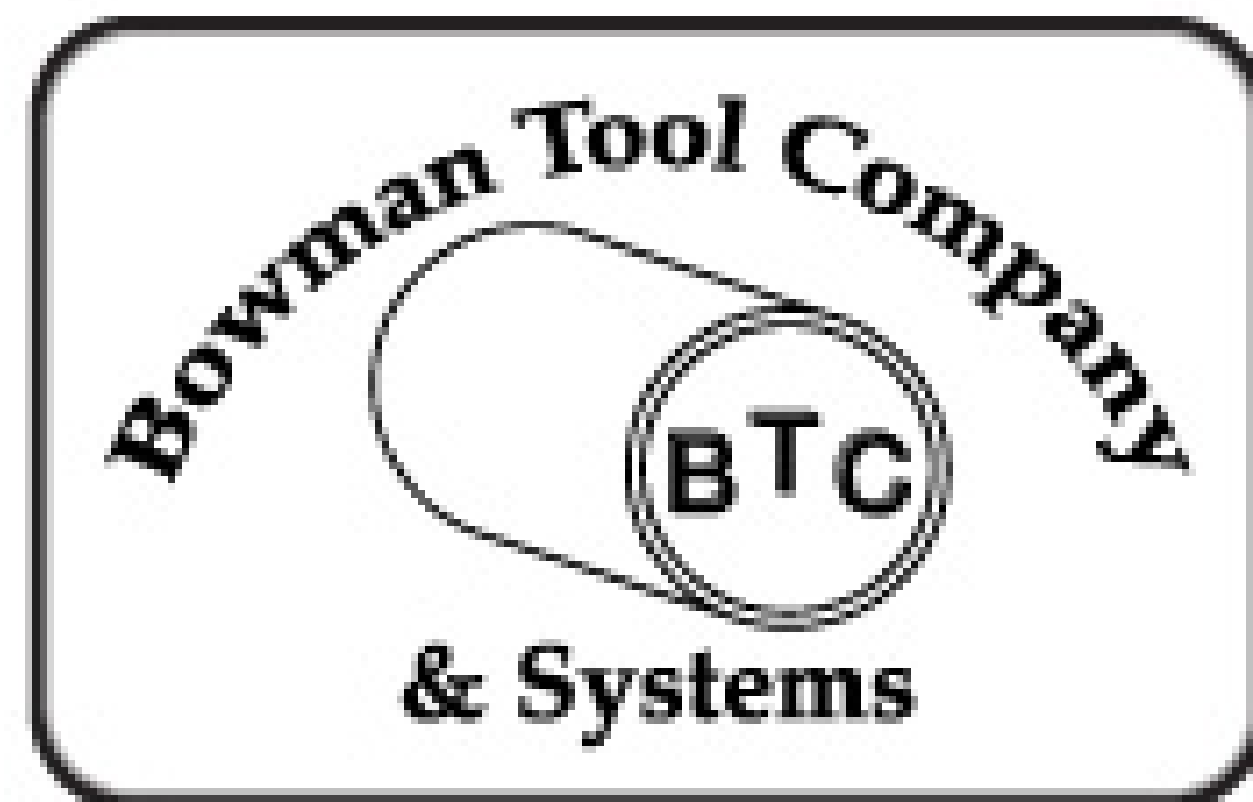
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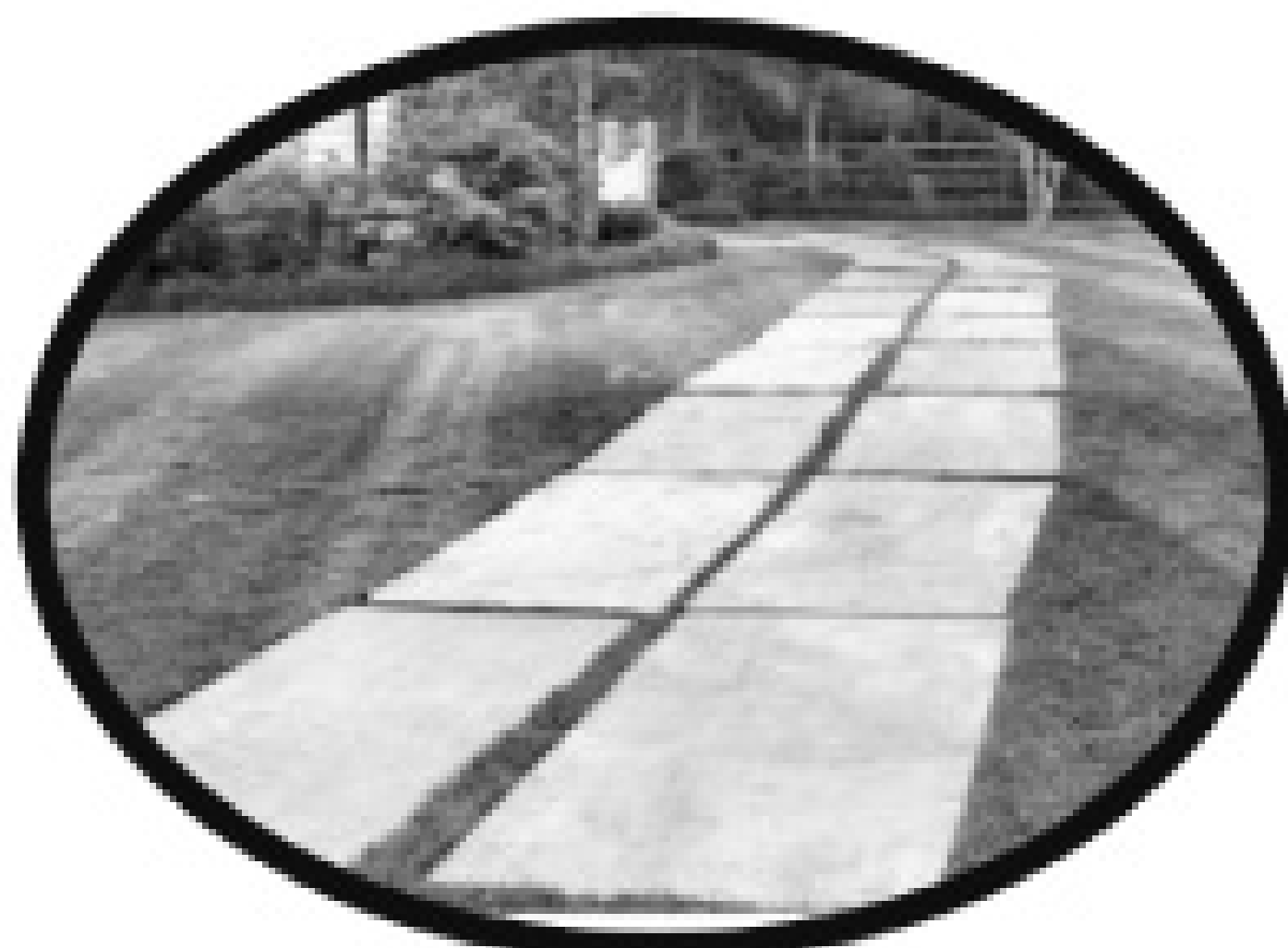
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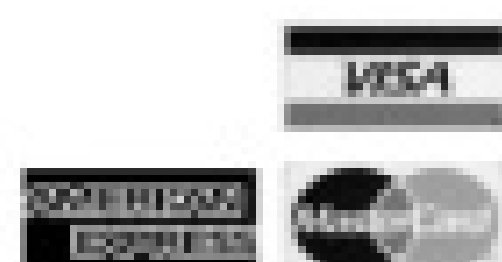
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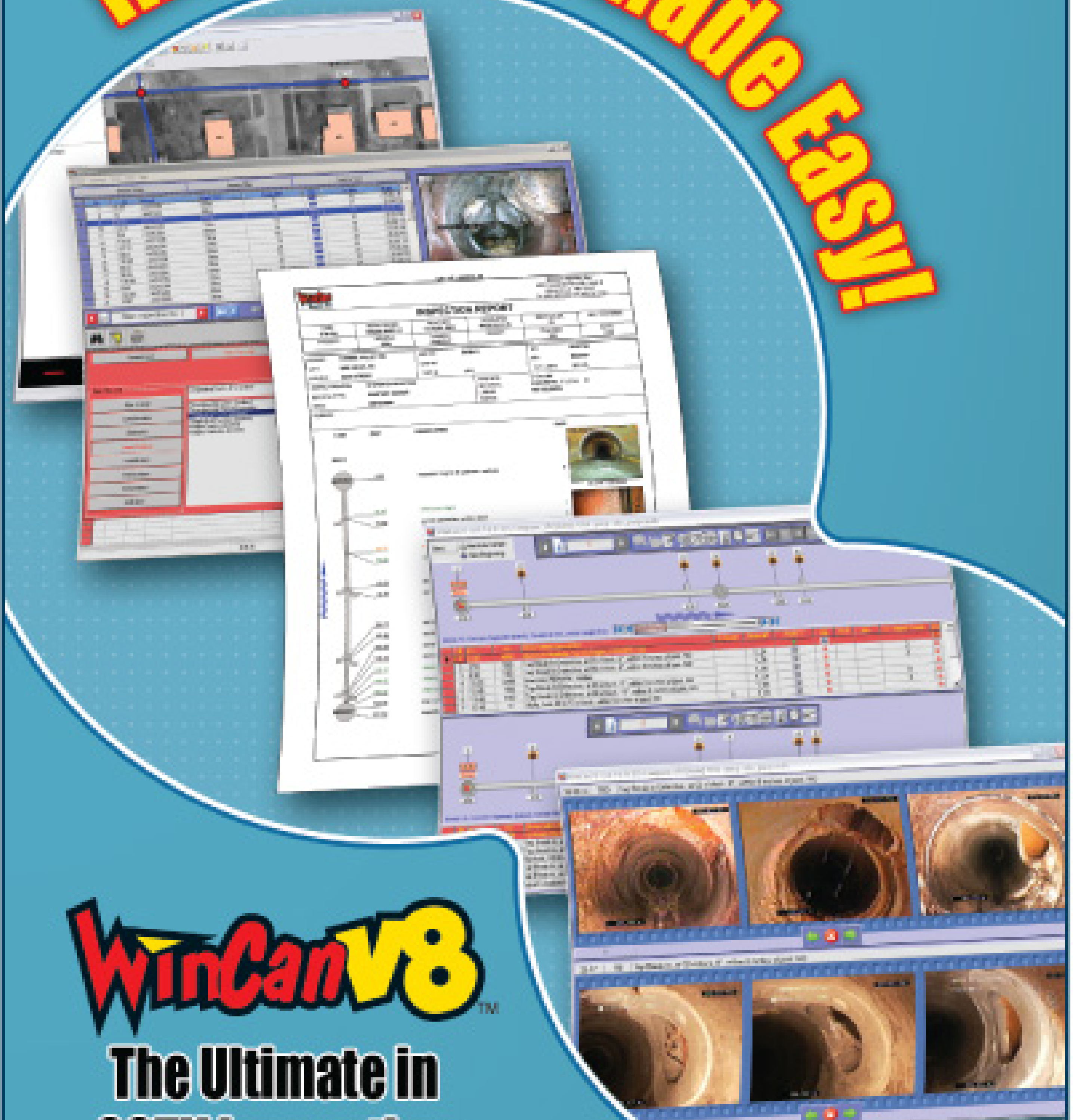
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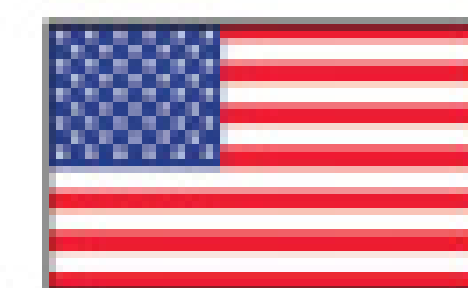
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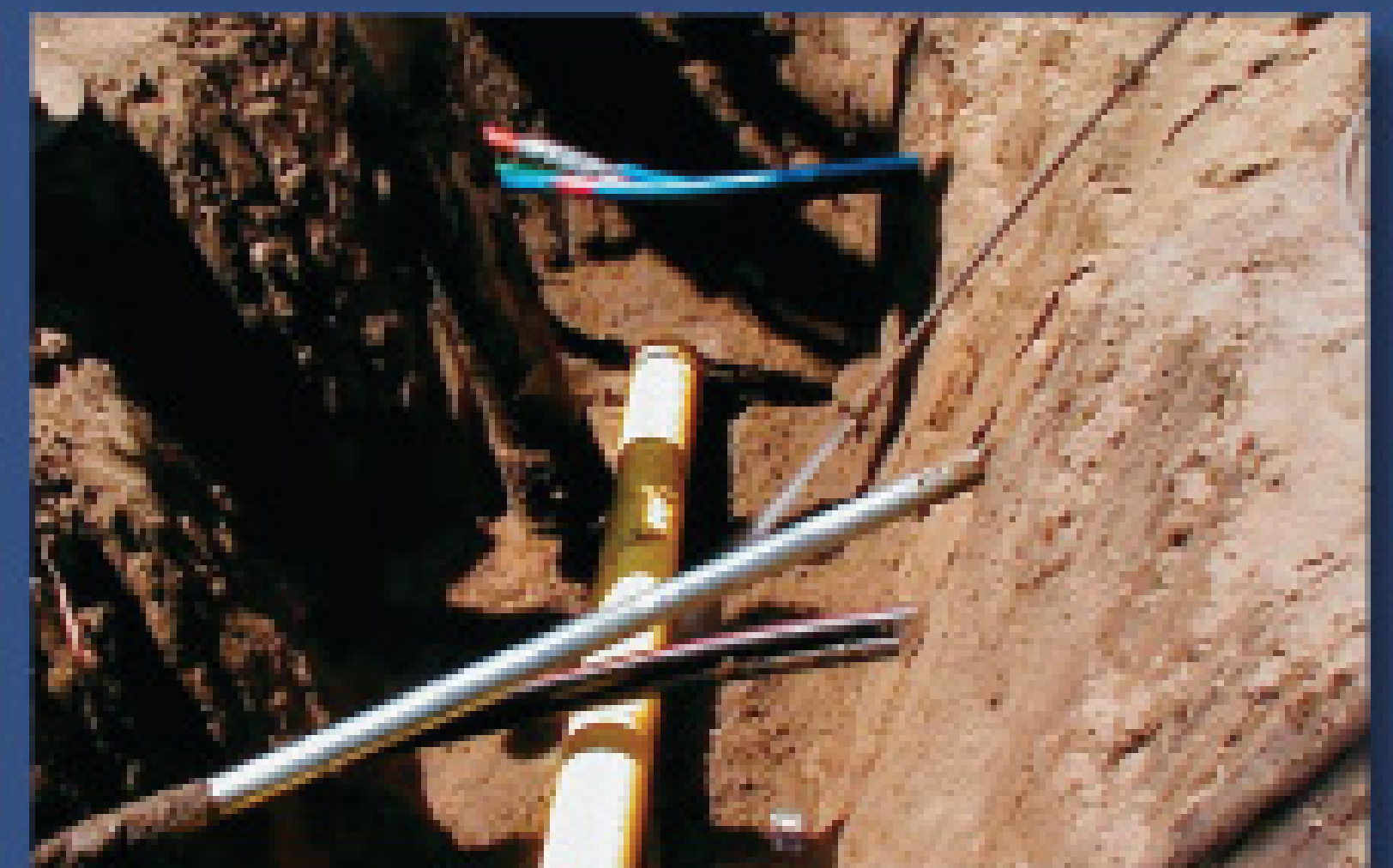
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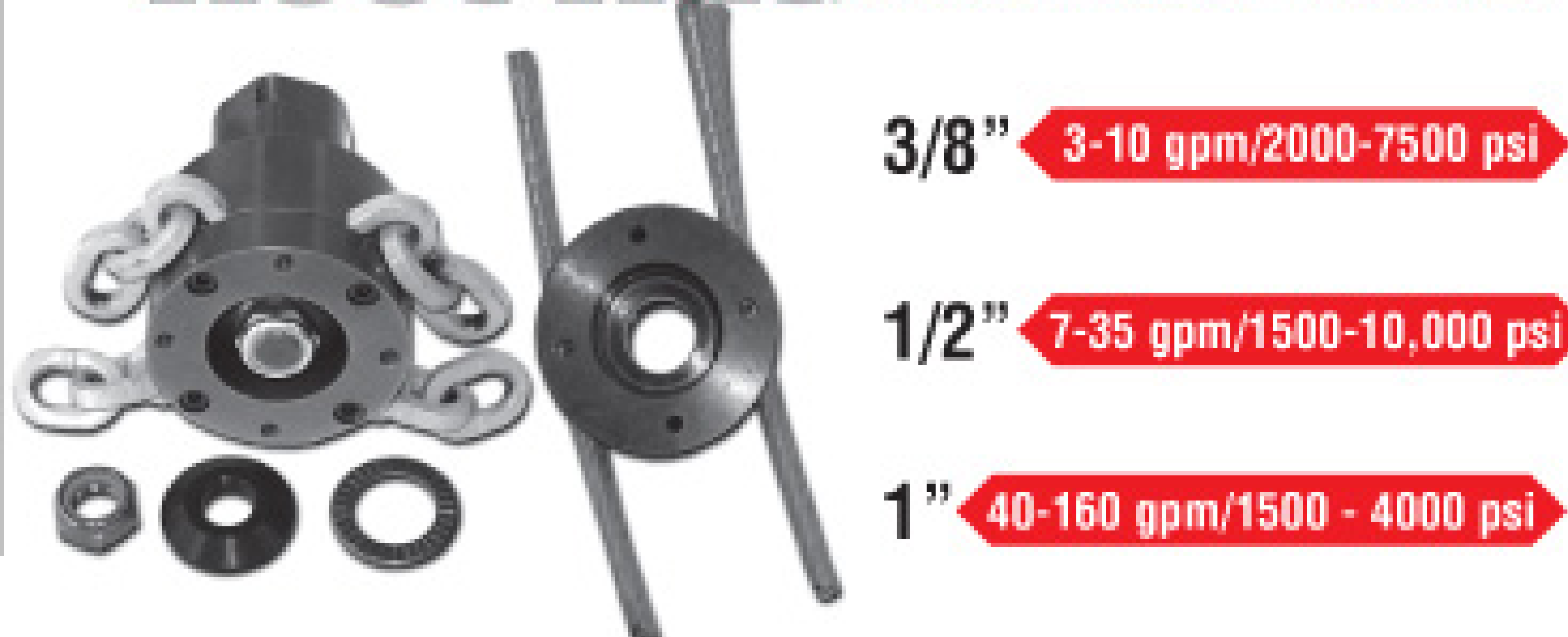


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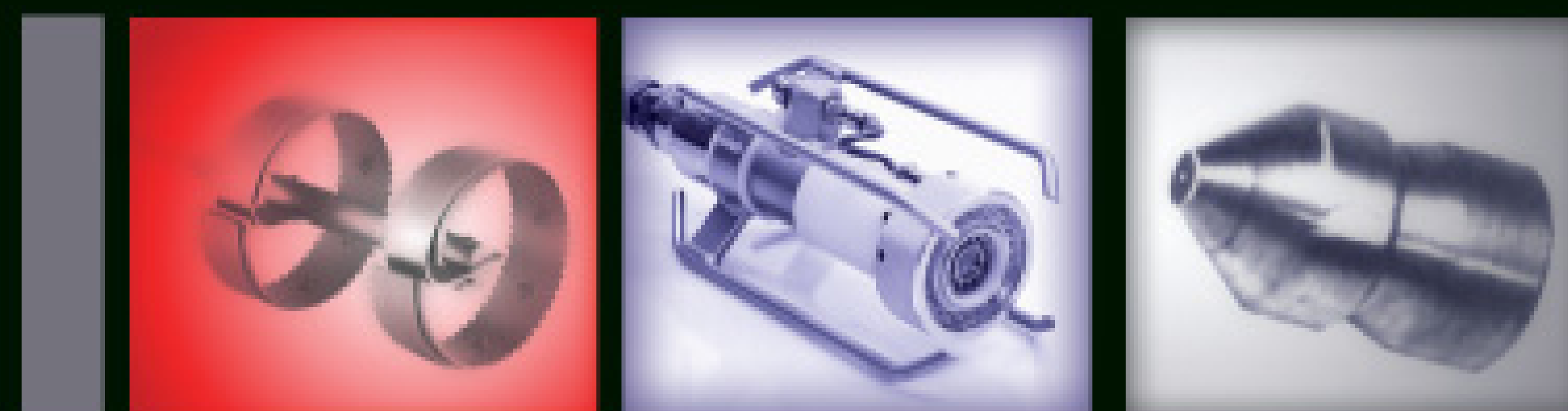
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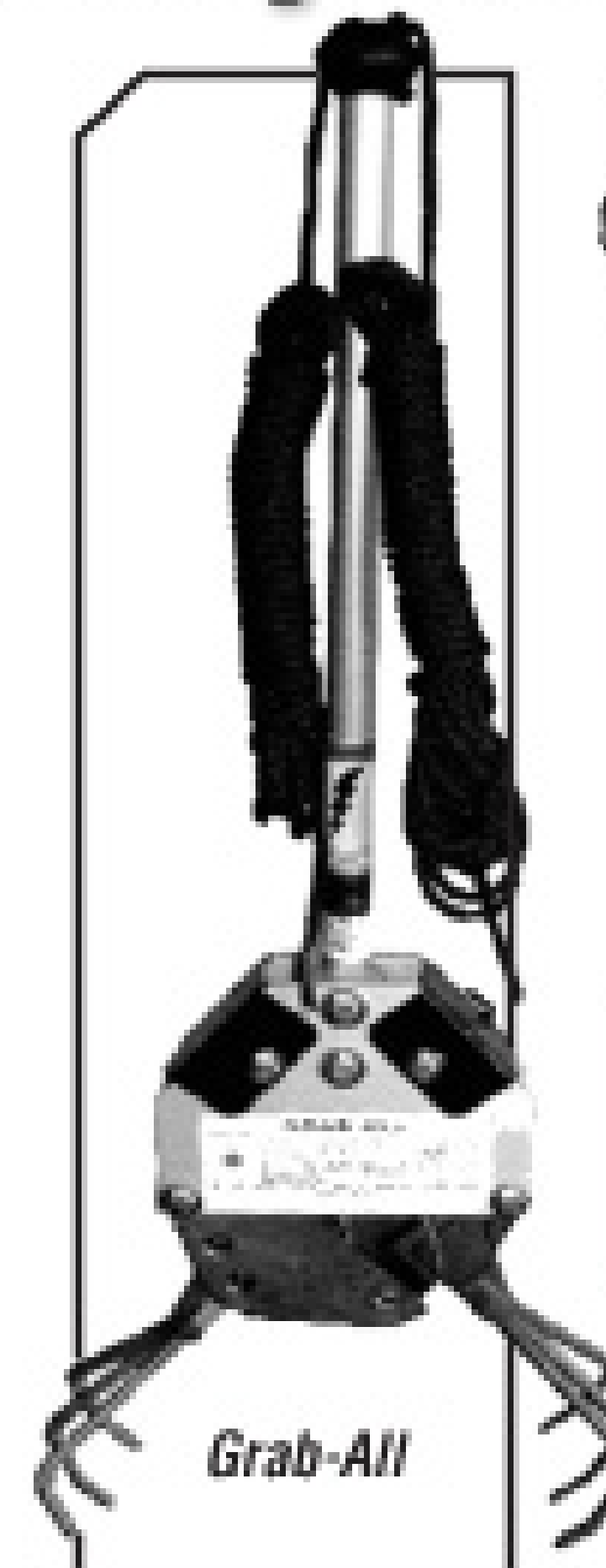
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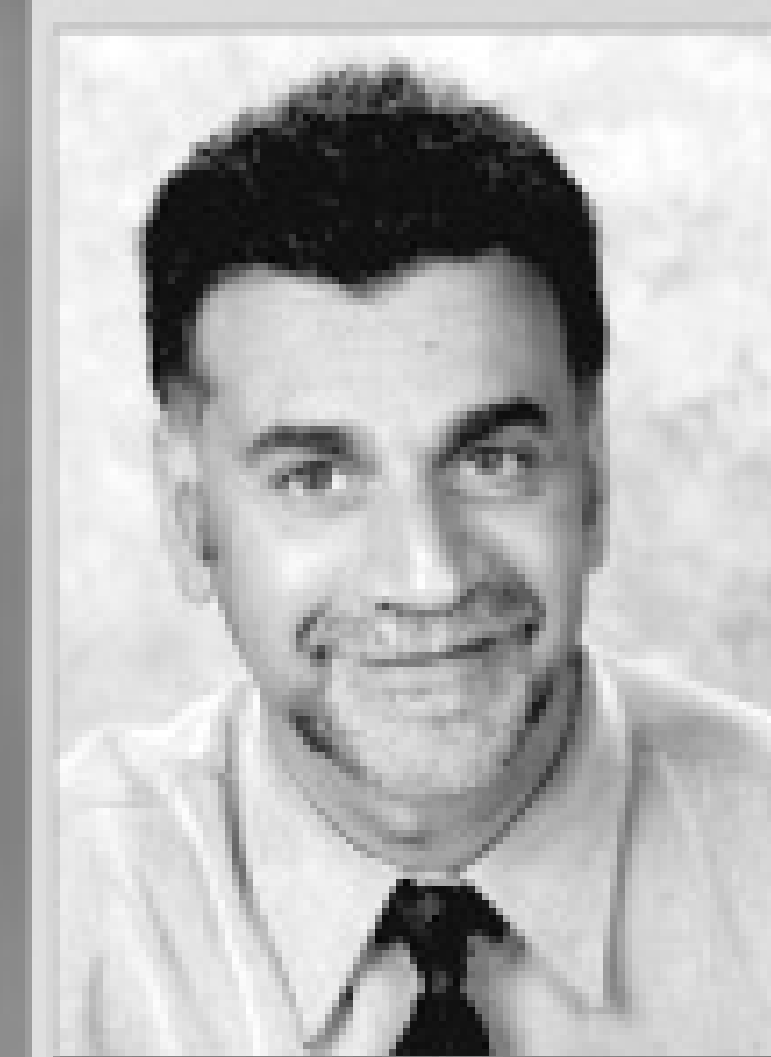
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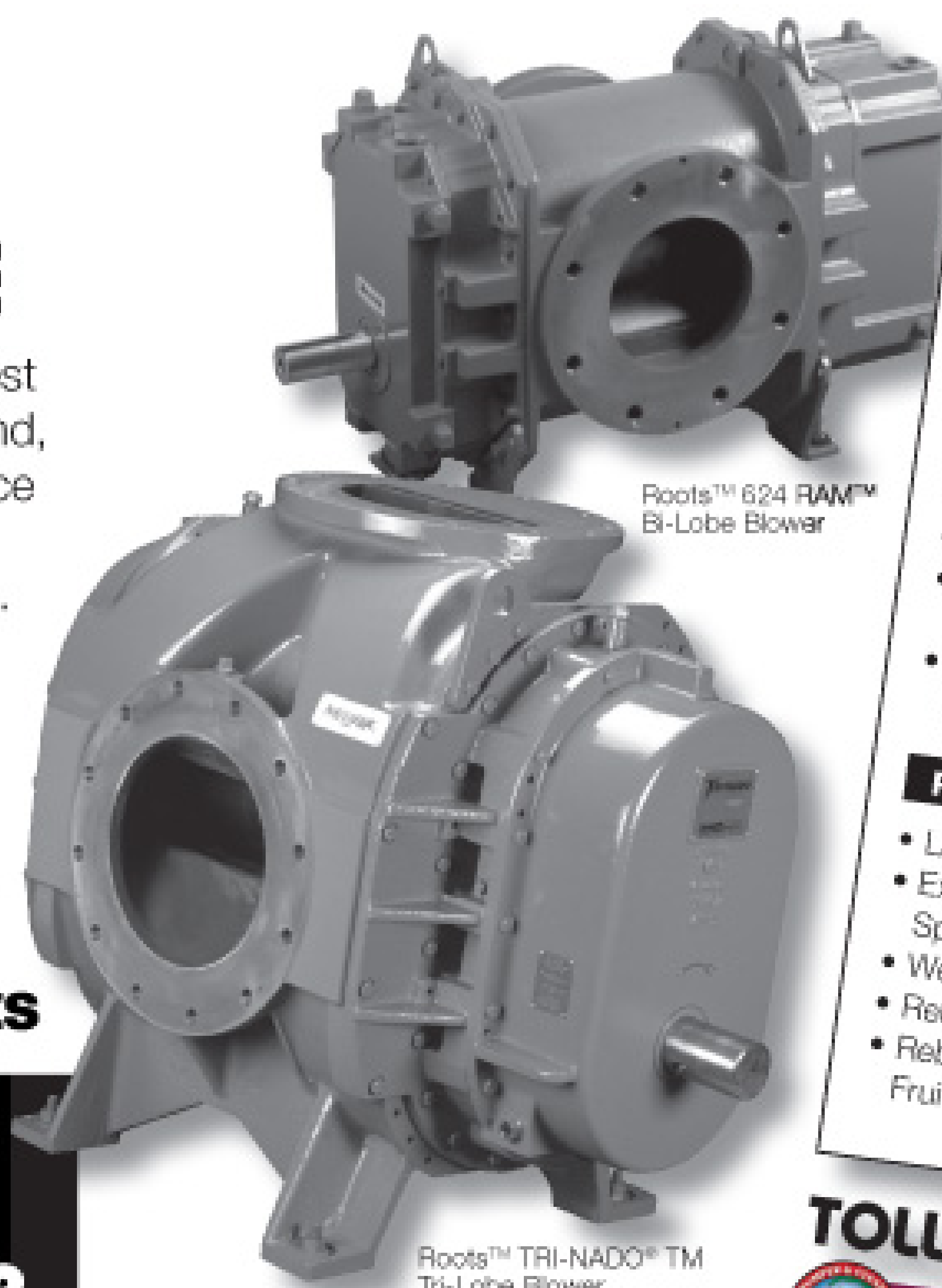
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Smoke and dye testing give contractors simple yet effective tools to help communities and commercial customers find system defects

By Scottie Dayton

Contractors are often called upon to locate leaks and sources of inflow in sanitary sewers, or to identify faults in mains, laterals, and house plumbing, including roof and yard drains. They may be asked to find sources of odors, locate cross-connections, trace plumbing and power plant piping, and analyze onsite treatment systems.

Smoke and dye testing are simple, inexpensive, yet effective methods for conducting those kinds of investigations. Smoke-generating devices (SGD) using candles, bombs, and liquid agents help pinpoint leaks in sewer pipes. Fluorescent dyes make it easy to trace errant flows of water to the source. By knowing what to use, and how, and in which situations, contractors get the desired results as efficiently, quickly, and productively as possible.

Smoke-testing protocol

Contractors usually perform smoke testing on behalf of municipalities or sewer utilities. As part of the protocol, members of the public and fire and police departments must be notified before a test begins. The usual notification procedure is to distribute leaflets door to door, and sometimes use the news media to spread the word.

"Smoke may enter buildings through faulty plumbing, and if

smoke can enter, so can dangerous sewer gases," says Bob Rothenberg, vice president and general manager of PrimeLine Products Inc., a provider of smoke testing products. "Building owners are usually thankful that defects are discovered during testing, and not after someone falls ill from escaped gases."

Sections of pipe to be tested are usually plugged. Then a gasoline-driven blower pushes smoke through the lines with enough force to penetrate leaks. A negative test doesn't mean the results are conclusive. Sagging laterals can trap water, blocking and preventing the smoke from reaching roof leader connections or driveway drains. Debris collecting in stormwater basins or lodging in pipes also prohibits the passing of smoke.

Sometimes smoke is observed escaping from grassy areas or through cracks in the pavement, indicating damaged pipes or open joints. "Smoke testing should not be used to locate these defects, as high groundwater and tight soil conditions can trap smoke below ground," advises Rothenberg. "For these reasons, contractors should choose blowers with high airflow outputs."

Bombs and candles

Contractors can choose time-tested solid smoke-generating devices or the more recently developed liquid smoke. Both products have their place.

Scott Jensen, western region sales manager for Cheme Underground, notes that solid devices seem more intuitive — just light the fuse, place the product in the smoke blower, and begin testing. "Some contractors say that solids produce better-quality smoke, but someone has to light them," he says. "The work involved in maintaining a



Smoke testing is a simple and reliable method of locating leaks in sewer systems. (Artwork courtesy of Hurco Technologies Inc.)

"Smoke may enter buildings through faulty plumbing, and if smoke can enter, so can dangerous sewer gases. Building owners are usually thankful that defects are discovered during testing, and not after someone falls ill from escaped gases."

Bob Rothenberg
PrimeLine Products Inc.

continuous flow of smoke could mean additional labor."

Typical smoke bombs last three minutes, but 60- and 30-second varieties are available. One possible solution is to use double-wick devices that tie together, increasing the smoke-generating time. The products do have a shelf life and can be adversely affected by humidity.

Classic smoke candles generate a highly visible, uniform white smoke that travels farther and shows leaks that some systems may miss, says

James A. Kovacs, general manager of Superior Signal Company Inc. The candles, with a total obscuring power 10 times greater than crude oil, fit most blowers, including those designed for liquid smoke.

Fuse ignitions can be dangerous in the presence of volatile sewer gasses, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) requires workers to wear respirators in areas where smoke can be inhaled, notes Lyndon "Lynn" Hurley, president of Hurco

Tech Perspective looks at technology-related issues and provides information and advice that cleaning professionals can apply to equipment selection and to their daily work in the field. Industry members are welcome to offer ideas for this column. Please direct them to editor Ted J. Rulseh, editor@cleaner.com.



An Air-Loc smoke testing system from Cheme Industries Inc.

Technologies Inc. The smoke contains high concentrations of zinc chloride, which attacks the respiratory system. "Proper smoke-testing programs should include laboratory-tested products and trained two-man crews," he says.

Bottled smoke

Liquid agents also generate dense smoke. "They have a longer shelf life than SGDs and seem to be gaining in acceptance," says Jensen. "Because the product creates a continuous flow of smoke, crews spend less time monitoring the blowing equipment."

Liquid smoke, in one-gallon, five-gallon, or drum-size containers, is poured into a pressurized tank connected to the blowing machine. One disadvantage, according to Jensen, is that operators may initially need extra time dialing in the blower to generate the optimum smoke.

"Choosing one system over the other depends on the quality of smoke, economics, and the consulting engineer's specifications," says Kovacs. "Smoke fluid systems can be custom-engineered to produce the maximum dry smoke using insulated liquid smoke conversion chambers and precision injectors."

Liquid agents, because they do not require a fuse for ignition, appear safer. However, Hurley advises contractors to obtain independent laboratory tests on the smoke being generated, not on the liquid as covered in MSDS sheets. "That's the

"Yellow-green dye is more resistant to absorption by suspended material in the water and is significantly less resistant to photo degradation than red dye. Red dye stands out more clearly from normal background fluorescence and in the presence of green algae."

Tim Muldoon
Kingscote Chemicals Inc.

only way to determine which agents are safe," he says.

Air and smoke blowers from Superior Signal come in squirrel cage and propeller configurations with various air flows and static pressures. Cherne Industries, for example, makes a lightweight, cast-aluminum smoke blower that generates more than 3,700-cubic-feet-per-minute of air flow. A 1/2-inch, foam-cell gasket provides a leak-free seal on manholes and minimizes vibration. Contractors can use the blowers with the smoke bomb box holder or add a pressurized tank and hose to accommodate fluid smoke.

Fluorescent dyes

Fluorescent dyes act like a coloring label on each drop of water, tracing its travels until the dye reaches extreme dilution. The visual aspect of fluorescent dyes refers to normal reflected light as color. The fluorescent aspect refers to chemical properties that absorb certain wavelengths, then emit, rather than reflect, light.

Technicians can see fluorescent

emissions by using black (ultraviolet) light or precisely measure the emissions with fluorimeters. Reflected and emitted light have different wavelengths and are, therefore, not the same colors.

"Fluorescent properties are of greatest value when tracing where there is no sun, or where the artificial light source is insufficient, precise quantified data is required, or minute amounts of tracing material are allowed," says Tim Muldoon, vice president of Kingscote Chemicals Inc., and dye producer.

Blue dyes have the highest degree of light stability, and reds are recommended for yellow and green backgrounds such as algae-rich water. FWT red and blue and FLT yellow-green are for waters that bear heavy sediment loads or that pass through soil with high clay content.

The dyes, which are temporary and degrade in sunlight, come in tablets, liquids, powders, and wax forms such as cakes, cones, and doughnuts. "For small quantities of water, tablets are easy to use and require no measuring," says Muldoon. "Technicians can drop or flush them into the system, where they dissolve in three to five minutes. They also can be dissolved in water to form a calculated concentration."

Powders and liquid concentrates are better suited for larger bodies of water. In situations of long-term flow or ongoing coloration, wax products provide optimum dissolution rates in large systems. Doughnuts can be suspended from a string into water. Cakes and cones are used in medium and small systems.

Color wheel

Muldoon says deciding which dye color to use depends on the color, type, water turbidity, and the suspended solids in it. "Any color dye works in clear water," he says. "If the liquid is yellow or green, FWT red (rhodamine WT) is best,

especially if using visual methods to estimate dye concentration. Visually, the dye appears bright pink to red, depending on its concentration, and bright orange under ultraviolet light."

Muldoon recommends FLT yellow-green (fluorescein) for murky brown water. It appears yellow-green visually or lime-green under UV light. "Yellow-green dye is more resistant to absorption by suspended material in the water and is significantly less resistant to photo degradation than red dye," he says. "Red dye stands out more clearly from



Smoke candles like these from Superior Signal Co. Inc., create a uniform and highly visible white smoke.

normal background fluorescence and in the presence of green algae." The absorption-emission wavelengths also are different.

Blue dyes are only visually detected, appearing aqua to royal blue, depending on the concentration and the activity of the water. Blue has the highest light stability, while red is recommended for yellow and green backgrounds, such as algae-rich water.

The dyes are nontoxic, biodegradable, and certified to meet ANSI/NSF Standard 60 for use in and around drinking water. However, technicians should wear gloves and goggles, as dyes may cause skin irritation and staining.

Simple, low-cost testing programs save taxpayers money and reduce unnecessary maintenance chores, while sustaining the public's health and the environment. ■



Smoke testing requires little more than a smoke-generating device, a blower, and a knowledgeable crew. (Photo courtesy of Cherne Industries Inc.)

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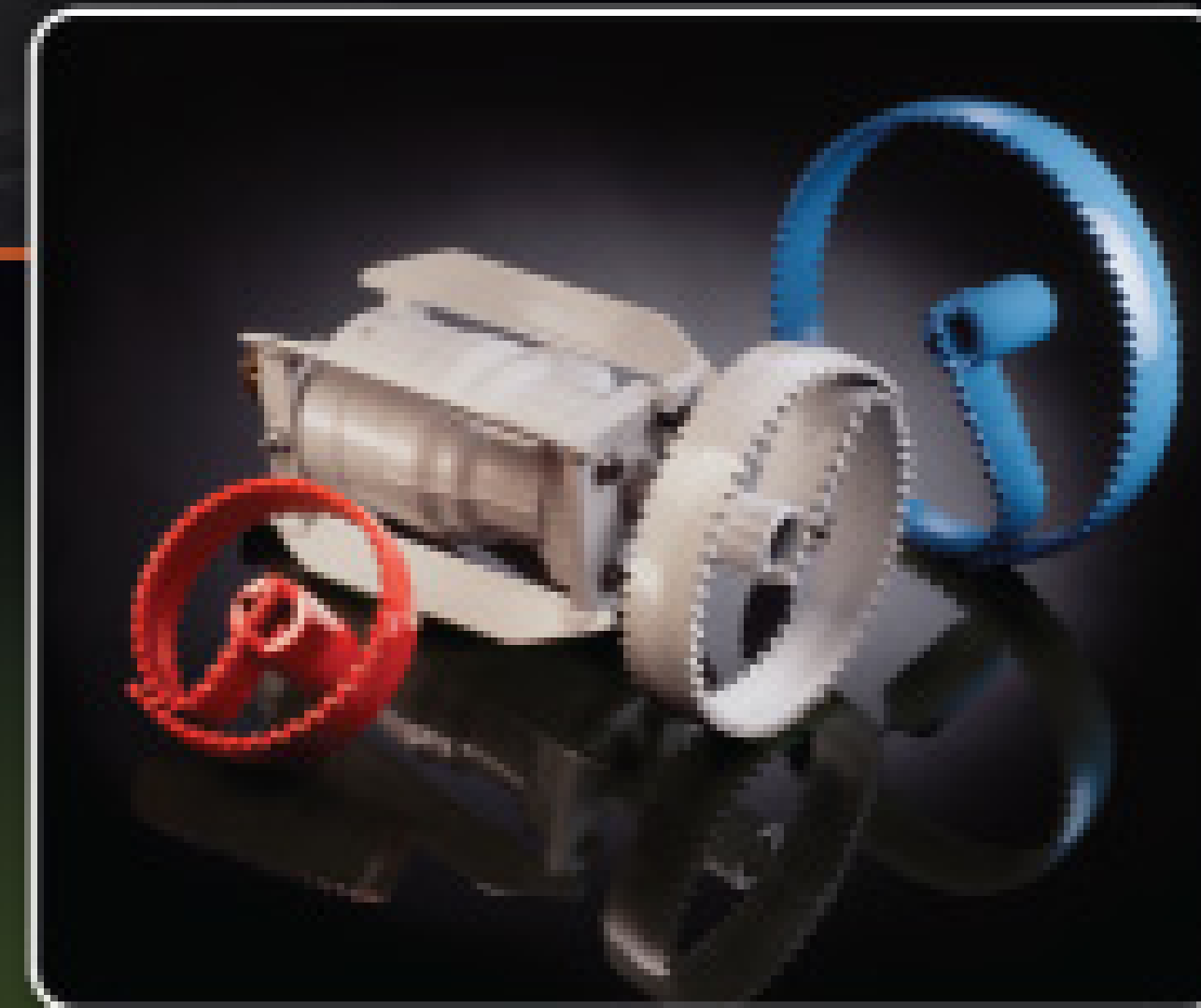
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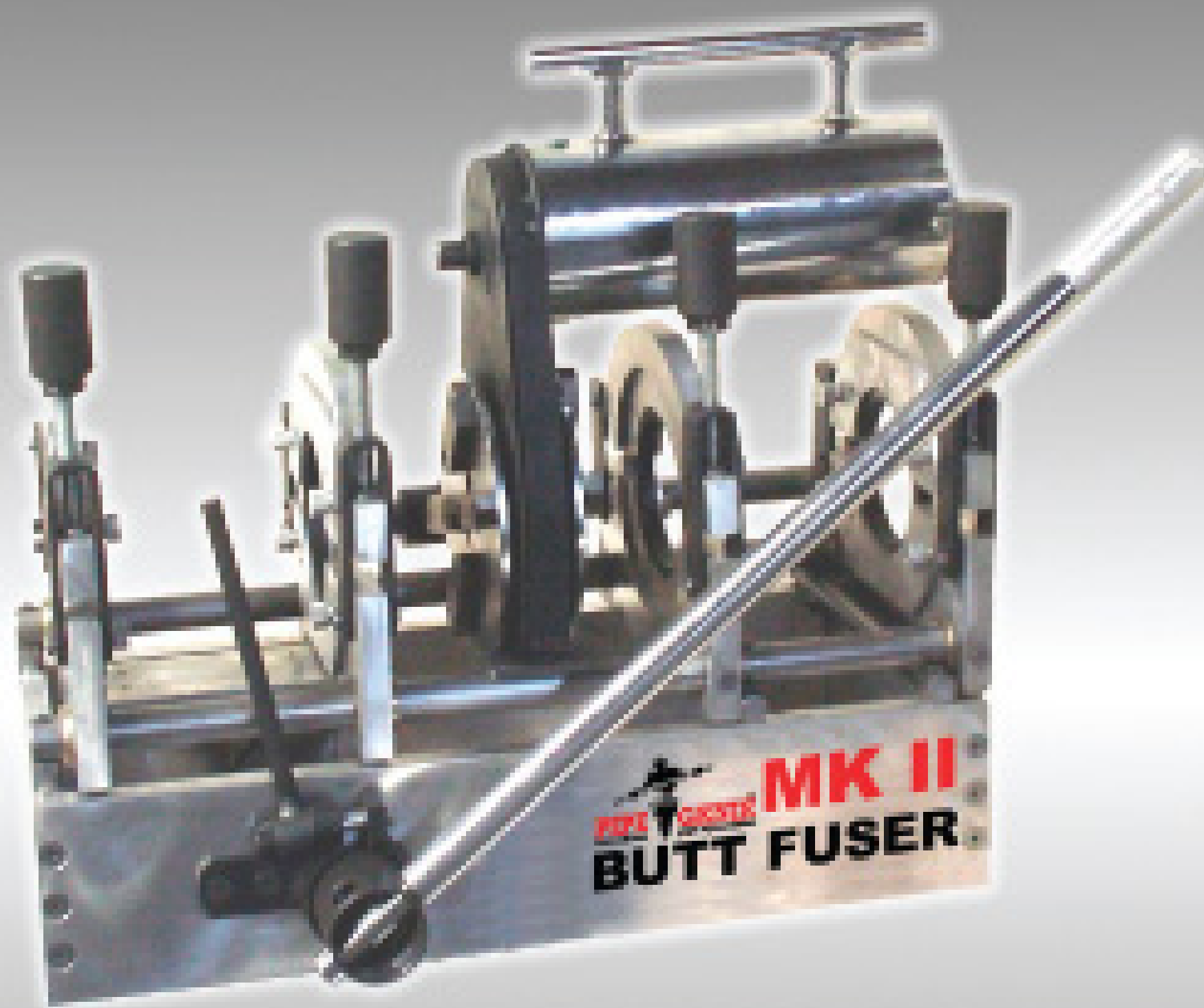
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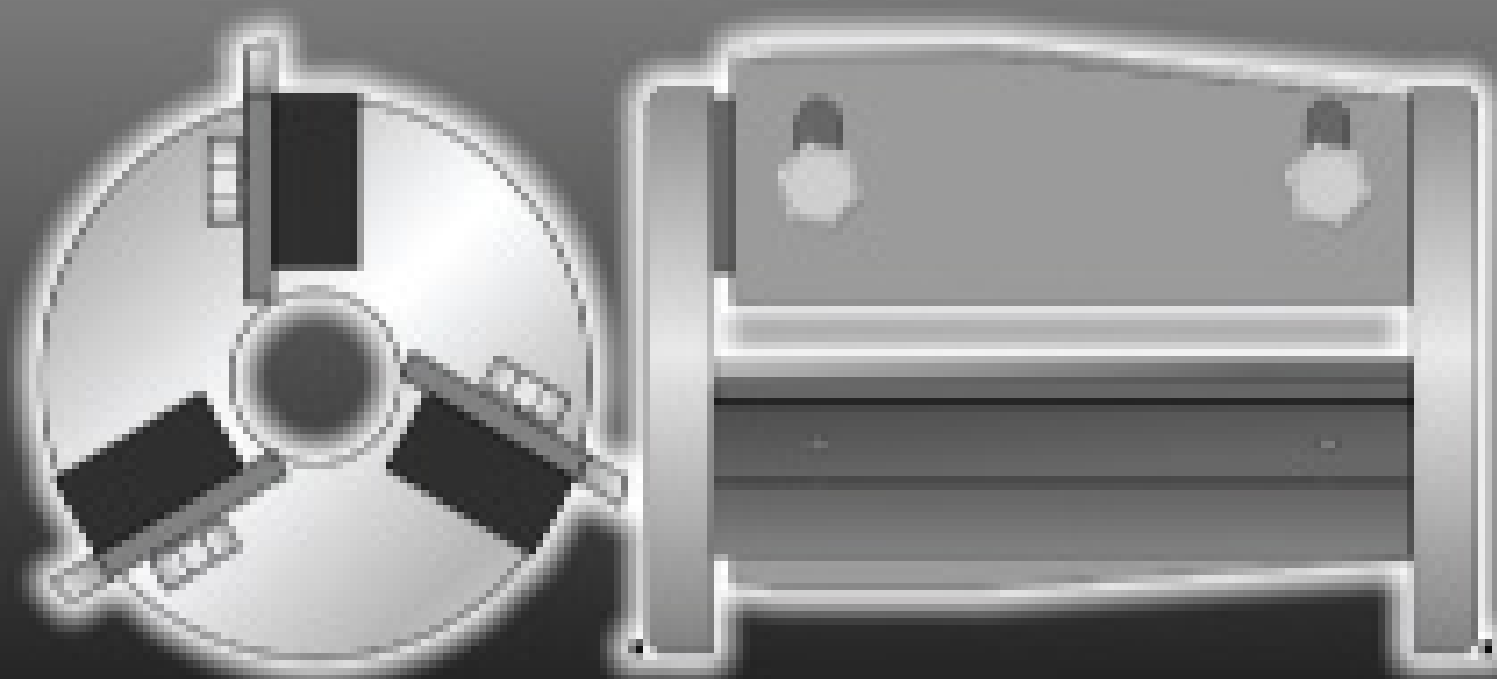
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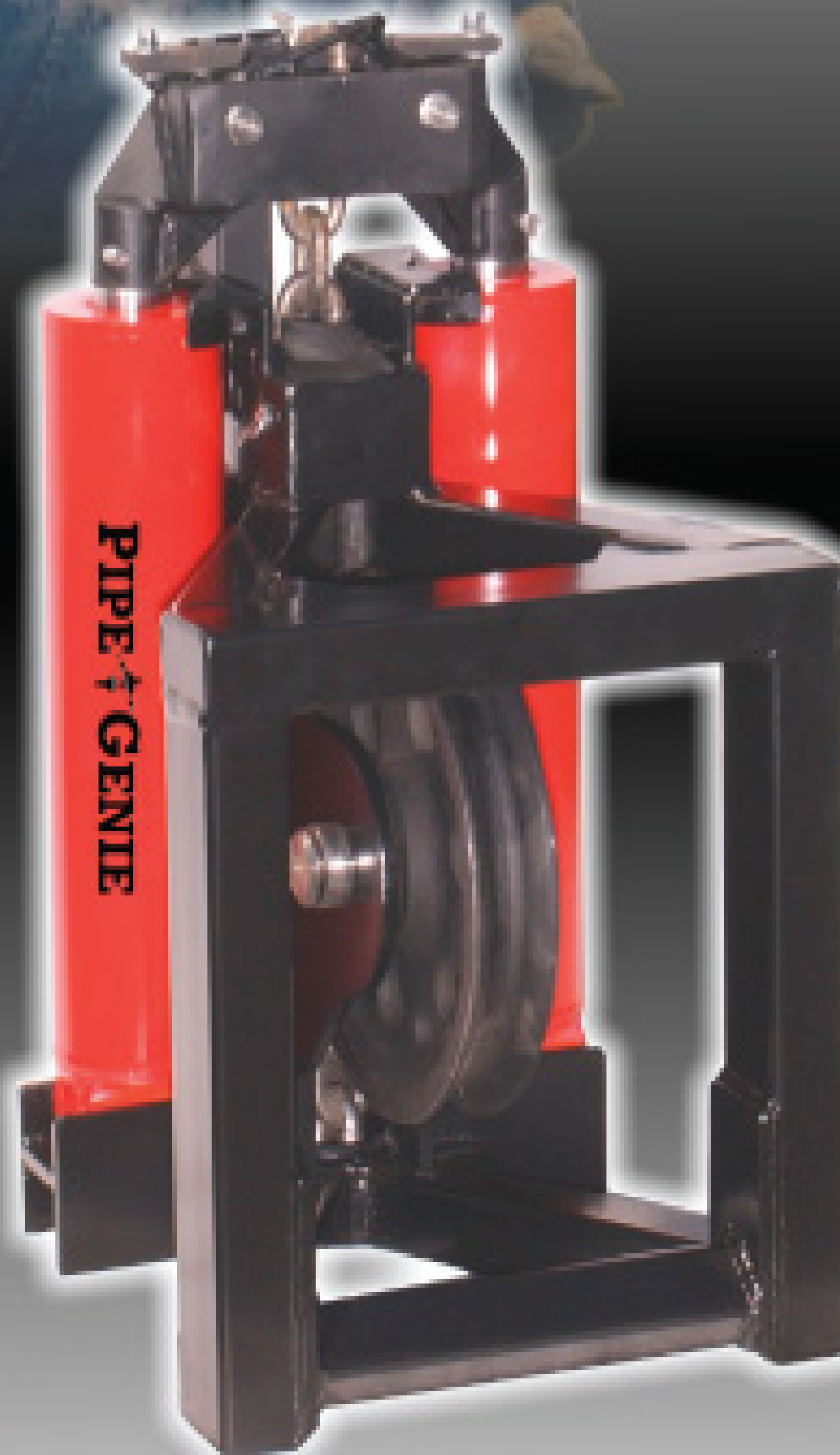
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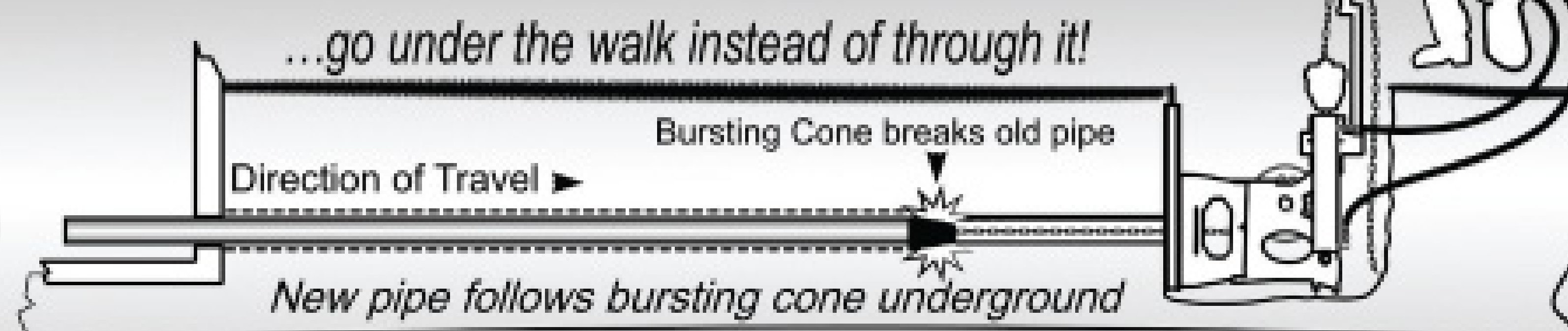
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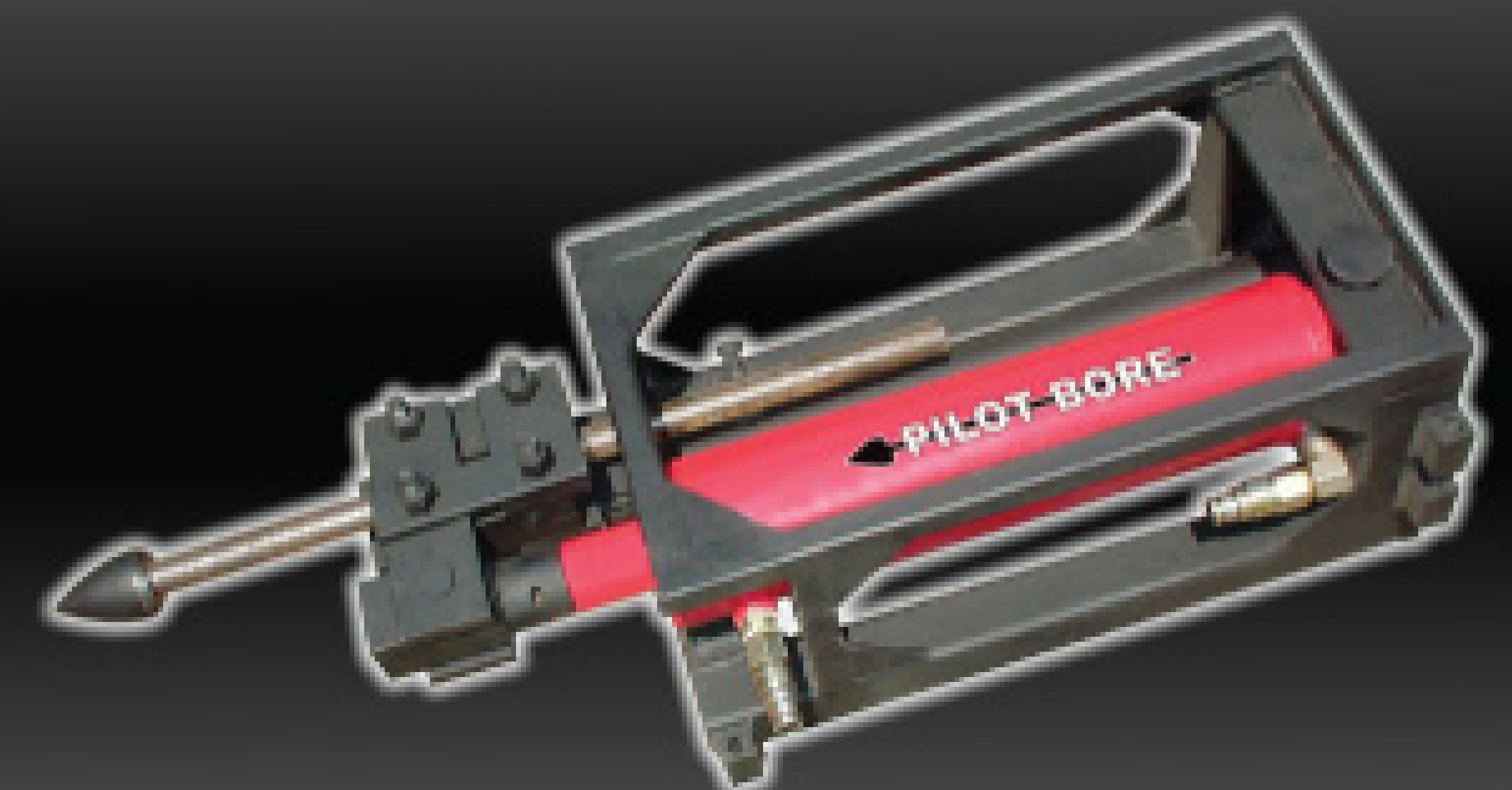


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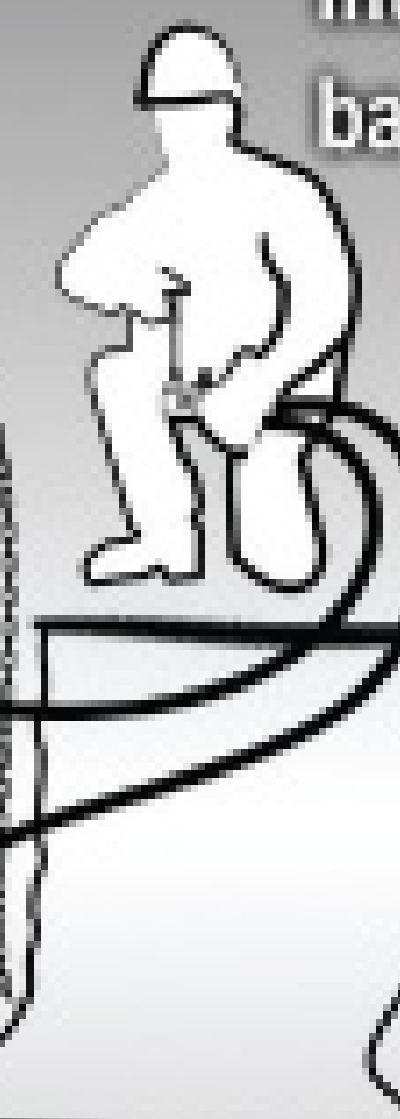
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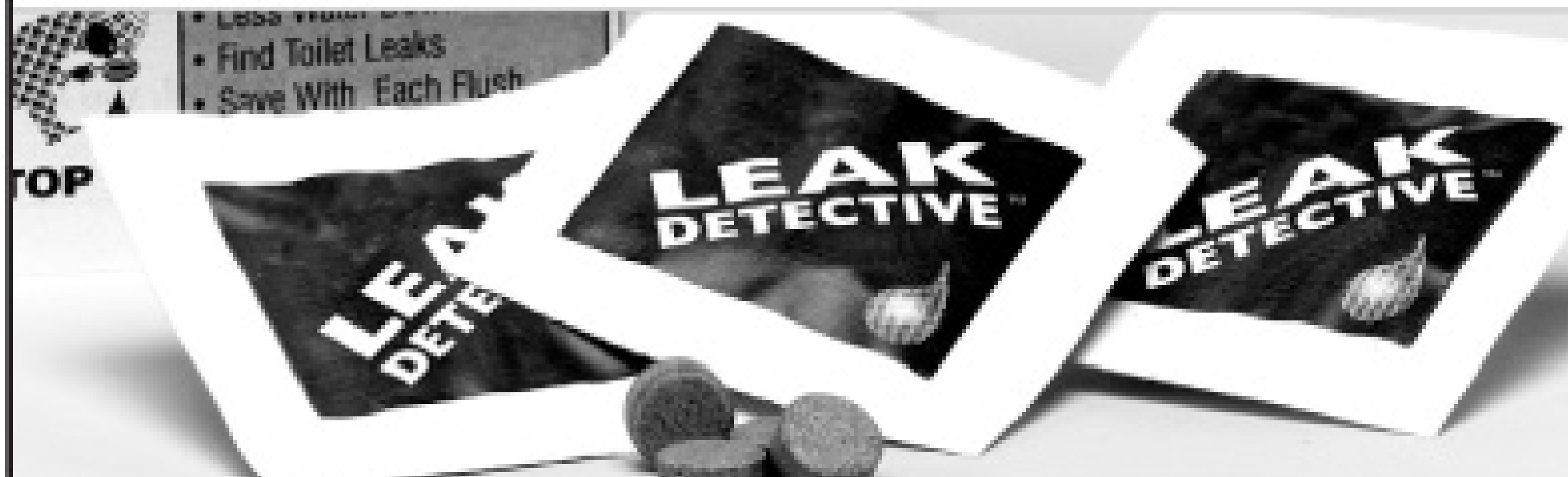
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Then and Now

Contractors explore how the industry has changed and how those changes affect the way they operate their businesses

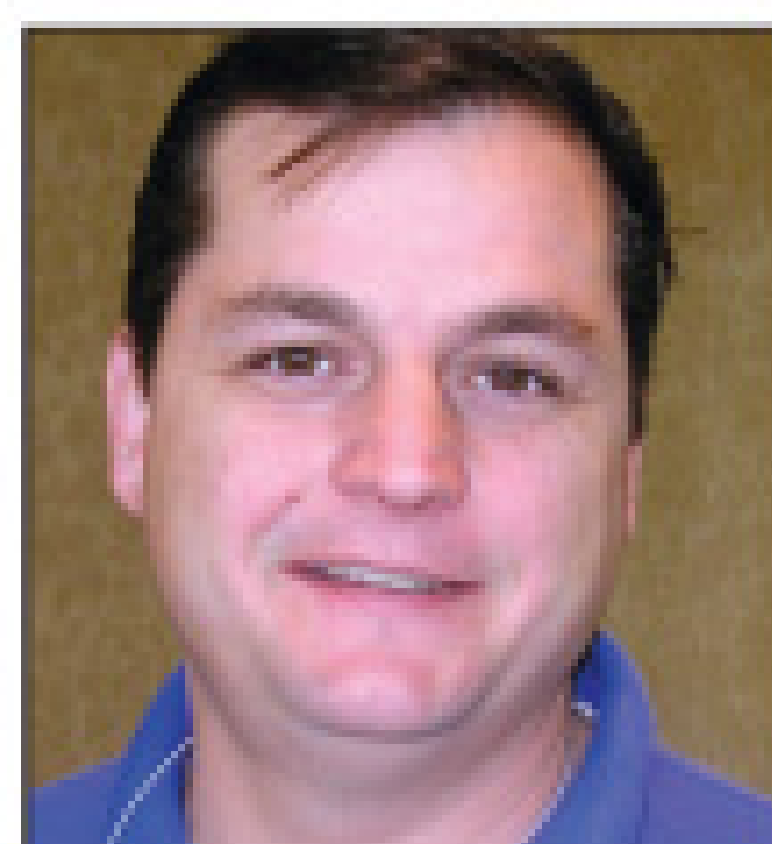
By Mary Shafer

Every so often, every business owner takes a breather from the daily grind. It's only natural at such times to pause and reflect on the larger picture to see what's going on in the industry. You've heard it before: The only thing that stays the same is change.

With myriad developments in technology each year, cleaning businesses are undergoing as much change as in any industry. Everything is affected, from back office management and dispatching to the tools and equipment you use in the field. Here, operators share their thoughts on trends affecting their businesses and how they're responding as planners and managers to stay ahead of the curve.

It's been nearly 40 years since **Rocket Rooter** opened, and much has changed in that time. One of the big changes has been the arrival of the original owner's son, **Doug Belcher Jr.**, as co-owner.

The firm splits its billings roughly in half between commercial cleaning — mostly restaurant grease traps, drain cleaning and camera line inspection — and septic



Doug Belcher Jr.

Co-Owner
Rocket Rooter
Rockville, Md.
Employees: 8

system pumping and repair. The biggest change Belcher has noticed has been an evolution in the billing process.

"It used to be we'd do strictly time and materials billing, but I think our newer, straightforward pricing — a set fee for a certain type of job — just works better. It's better for the customer, because

"It used to be we'd do strictly time and materials billing, but I think our newer, straightforward pricing — a set fee for a certain type of job — just works better."

Doug Belcher Jr.
Rocket Rooter
Rockville, Md.

they know what they're going to pay up front, before we even get started. No surprises.

"And it's better for us, because it keeps us on our toes. To be profitable, we have to be consis-

tently efficient. It works as a training incentive so our guys can do the job fast and do it right the first time. That also means keeping up with new tools and equipment, so we make educating ourselves a priority."

Jason Sears has run **Versatile Worx** for three years, just over the border from Seattle, Wash. In that time, he has been keeping an ear to the ground for future trends,



Jason Sears

Owner
Versatile Worx Ltd.
Vancouver Island, B.C.
Employees: 1

and he believes he has identified one that will kick-start his business growth.

"Hydroexcavation is where we're headed," he says. "We're doing well with drains, installing perimeter drains and septic fields, but I've been going to educational sessions about this process. It's just so much faster."

Sears is exploring the best way to add the service. "The equipment isn't cheap, and I haven't had any specific inquiries yet, so I can see looking for an investor," he says. "But this is definitely what the future holds for us. It's a fantastic, useful technology with lots of applications. I bet no one has even thought of them all yet."

The enthusiasm of youth notwithstanding, a few years in business can temper your outlook, as **Mark Subola** of **Mark's Reddi-Rooter** knows. He inherited the business from his father. Mark seriously disliked it as he grew up, "But then I realized it was a good way to make a living, that I could own my own business and make my own decisions."

Subola has found, after 17 years in the business, that he needs to approach management decisions with much more planning. "Five years ago, I was happy with just the business we were doing at the time, and I focused on day-to-day operations. Then, two years ago, I came to Nashville for my first Pumper & Cleaner Expo.

"I became aware that it was time to make a serious business plan and some plans for the future. I've learned a lot, and it has given me a basis for some serious potential that I can create for myself and the guys who work for me."

What started him thinking in that direction? "You can have a bad year, or see someone you love have a serious medical issue, and it really can make you re-evaluate," he says. "You realize

Comments may be directed to Mary Shafer in care of Cleaner. You may also e-mail pipelines@cleaner.com.



you have to plan, because some day, you're going to have to retire.

"These are things you just don't appreciate in your 20s and 30s. When you're young and strong, you can drag that equipment around all day long and it doesn't bother you. But pretty soon, you realize you're missing out on a lot of things because you're working all the time. You're too busy making a living to make a life.

"I think lots of people in my position are taking a good, hard look at how they're making decisions. It's important never to lose sight of the

"I think lots of people in my position are taking a good, hard look at how they're making decisions. It's important never to lose sight of the original goals you had when you were younger. I think a lot of us, as we get older, change a lot as people. We can lose sight of what inspired us in the beginning."

Mark Subola, Owner
Mark's Reddi-Rooter
Madison, Wis.

original goals you had when you were younger. I think a lot of us, as we get older, change a lot as people. We can lose sight of what inspired us in the beginning."

Part of what causes this loss of vision can be burnout. "We can work too much," Subola says.



"You've got to make some time for yourself and the other people you want to

Mark Subola

Owner
Mark's Reddi-Rooter
Madison, Wis.
Employees: 8

keep in your life. It's hard to find a balance, especially when you're self-employed.

"There are a lot of loose ends that can fill your mind when you're not at work, but you have to focus and be present. When you're with the people who matter to you, you have to check in a lot more with them, and be there. You have to decide what your priorities are and then build and work your business plan accordingly." ■

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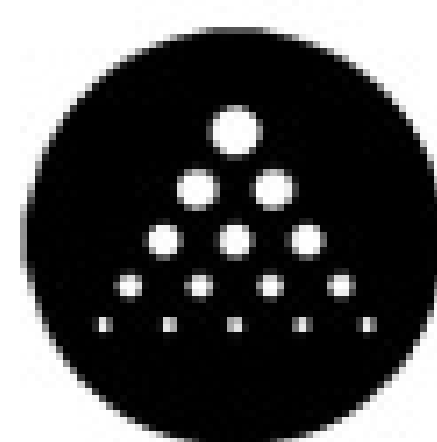
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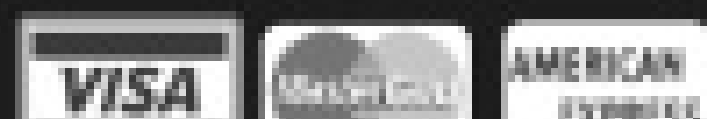
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FRANCHISE NEWS

K. Scott and Pam Hobbs, Ken Hobbs
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K. Scott Hobbs began his plumbing career in new construction in 1989. But after going through the typical struggles a new construction plumber goes through, Scott and his father Ken ventured into the service side. Following a few years of no sustained growth, they turned to Mr. Rooter, which Scott calls “a perfect match.”

In 2007, they received the Personal Achievement award, which acknowledges outstanding achievement in sales, manpower growth, personal growth or franchise development.

Why did you buy a Mr. Rooter franchise?

I knew I had to align myself with an organization that could help us grow to the potential I know we have. My father and I visited the Mr. Rooter corporate office and were impressed with the integrity of the entire staff and their willingness and ability to help us grow. After looking at other organizations, we found Mr. Rooter to be a perfect match.

My father and I visited the Mr. Rooter corporate office and were impressed with the integrity of the entire staff and their willingness and ability to help us grow.

How has your business changed since you became a franchise owner?

In 2000, we slowed down our new construction company of 40 plus employees to a profitable and manageable size and started a separate company to focus on only service. We ran the new shop for a few years trying to grow. I would get up to three trucks and then back down to one truck.



For Scott Hobbs (pictured far right), it's rewarding to work with his family: father Ken, daughter Brandi and wife Pam.

We started our Mr. Rooter franchise in 2004 with one technician and one helper. By learning an established system and having the ability to tap into decades of experience from other Mr. Rooter franchisees, we've grown to eight technicians.

...we've grown to eight technicians.

What is the biggest benefit of owning and operating a Mr. Rooter franchise?

I can't imagine trying to build this company, stay ahead of the competition and survive through challenging economic times without the guidance, training and support we receive from the Mr. Rooter Corporation as well as all the other Mr. Rooter franchisees.

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What do you see in the future for your franchise?

With the help of Mr. Rooter we have a business plan to more than double the current size of our company over the next few years. We have a lot more to learn and a lot of growth to achieve. My wife and our daughter have joined the company to help with the growth.



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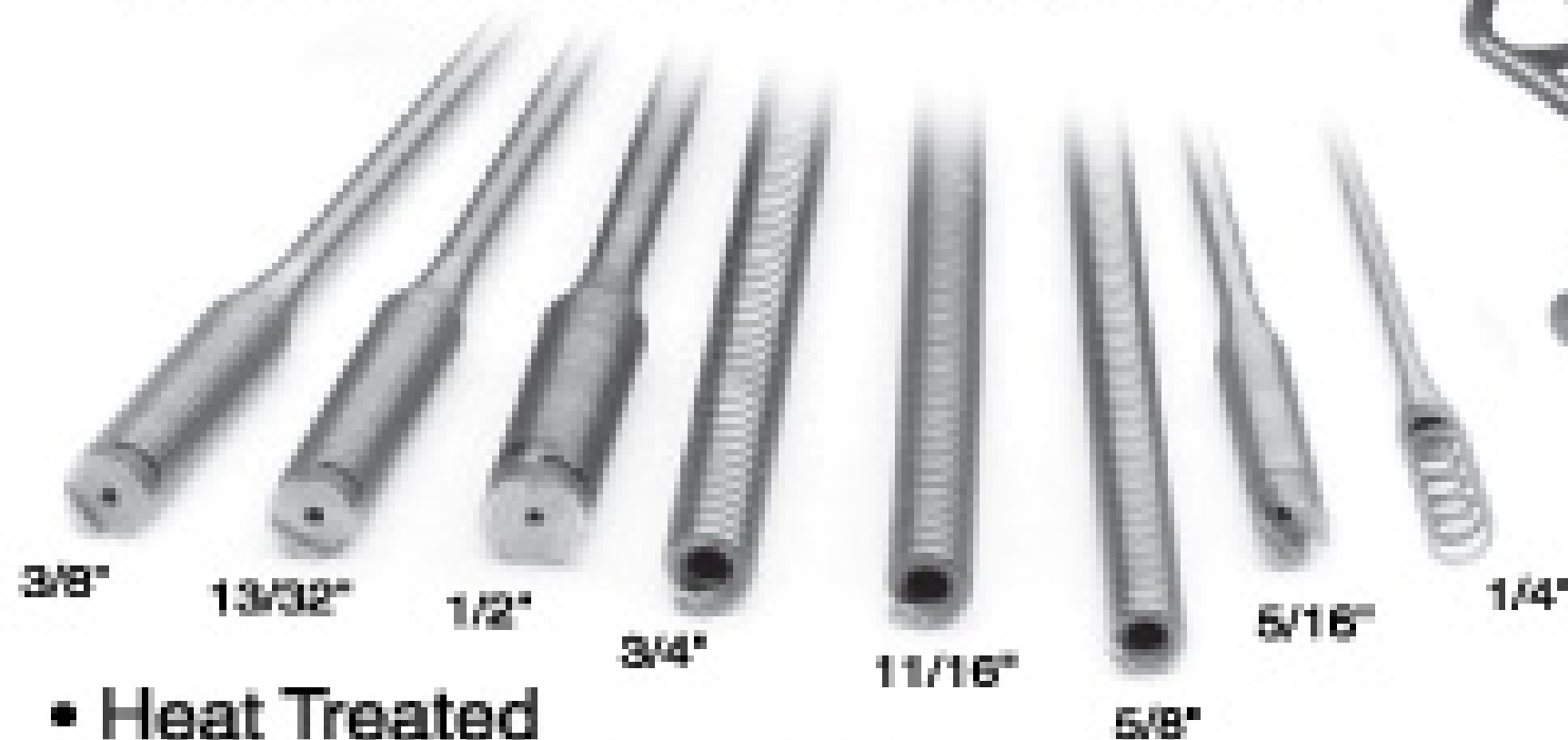
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Great Grab!

By Jim Kneiszel

To drain cleaner Allen Lewerer, quality service includes helping to keep marriages happy. Lewerer, co-owner of Mr. Rooter of St. Croix County in New Richmond, Wis., made television newscasts and newspaper headlines by cleverly using technology to fish a customer's long-lost wedding ring out of a clogged drain pipe.

Carey and Charlotte Moe called Lewerer to their home to flush a slow-draining sewer pipe. He cleared 60 feet of 4-inch cast iron pipe and flushed it with a hose to make sure it was clean. Then, examining the job with his MyTana color push camera with self-leveling head, Lewerer noticed what he thought was a scrap of copper pipe in the line.

Moe, looking at the same video picture, insisted it was the wedding ring that fell down the kitchen sink about 12 years ago. He told Lewerer he didn't have to take any extreme measures to retrieve it, but Lewerer insisted on pulling the ring out.

Lewerer attached a 3-inch pigtail retriever to his MyTana M81 The Big Workhorse cable unit

and sent it 32 feet into the pipe. Carefully twirling the retriever just in front of the camera, he hooked the ring with the pigtail bit and slowly pulled the camera and cable back.

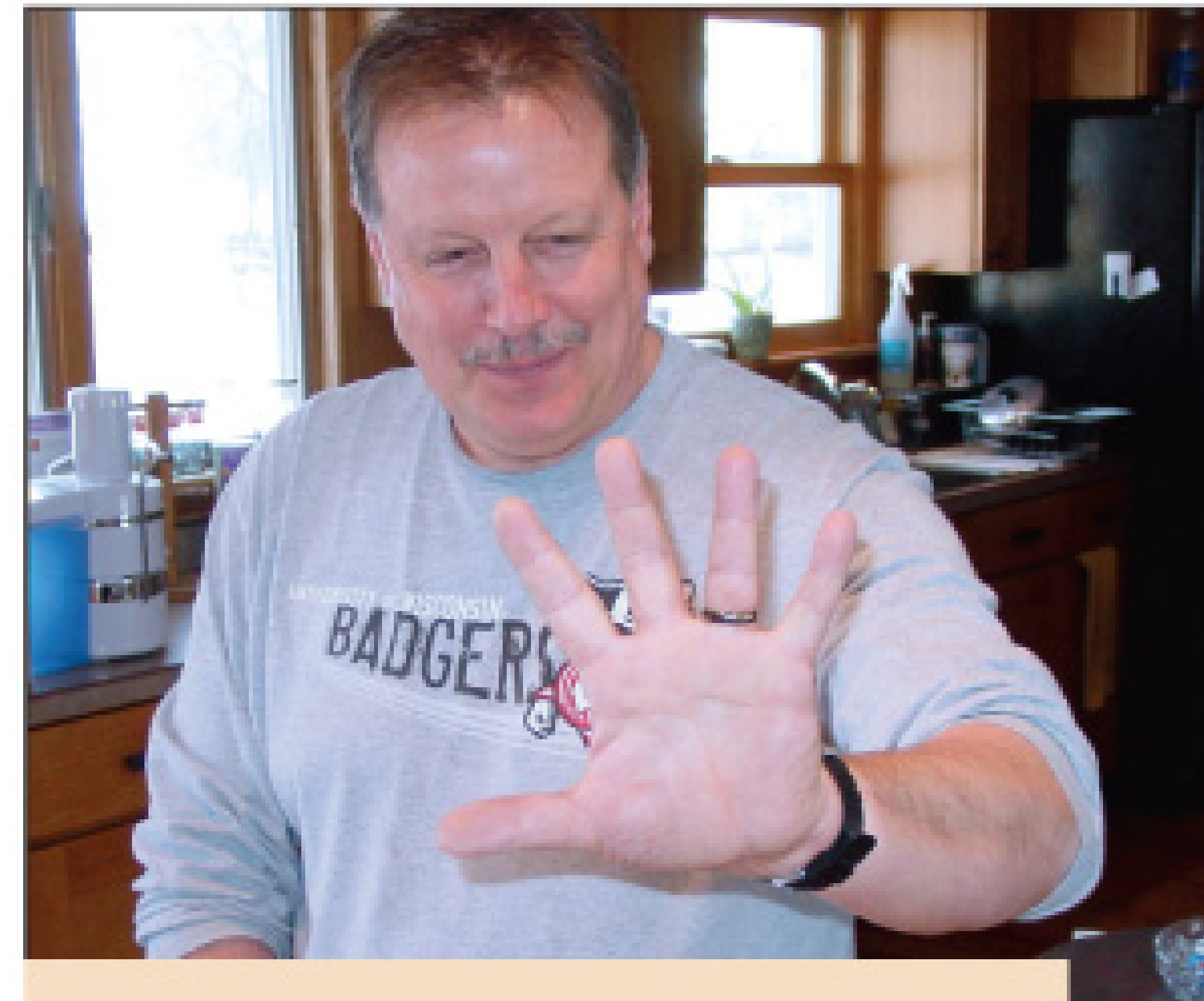
He dropped the ring about halfway back and had to snag it again. Then, when he got to the vertical cleanout, he wedged the camera against the pigtail and lifted. "I knew that as soon as I lifted it, I would lose the ring," he recalls. "So I pushed the camera against the retriever, lifting the camera and cable all up at once. I was going to try my damndest to get it out."

The rescue took about an hour, and Moe was happy enough to give Lewerer a \$20 tip. "He didn't have to give me anything," Lewerer says. "The biggest reward is being able to help a homeowner like that."

Lewerer returned the favor with a \$50 gift certificate to a local restaurant so the Moe's could celebrate the rescue of the ring. "I thought it was appropriate to send them out to supper," he said.

For information on the tools Lewerer used, call 800/328-8170 or visit www.mytana.com. ■

Carey Moe with his recovered ring.



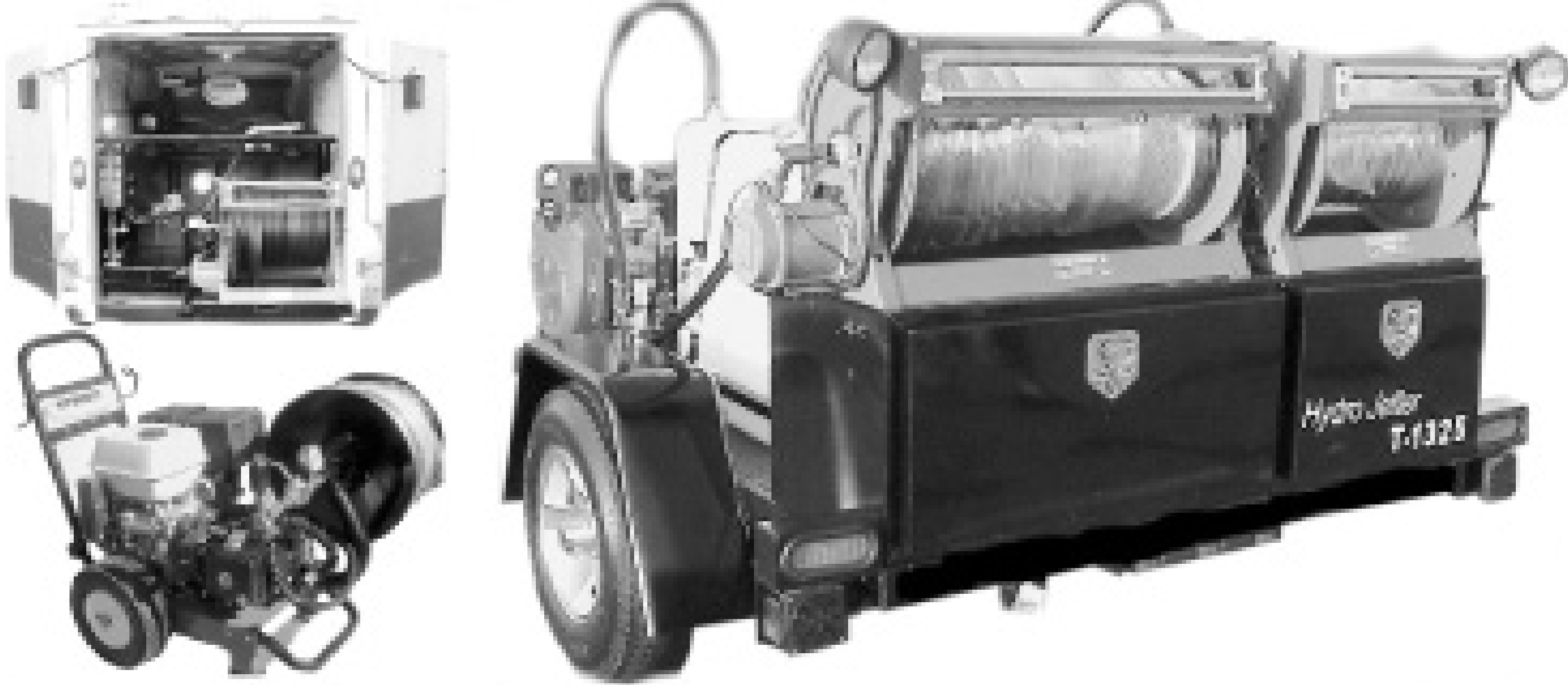
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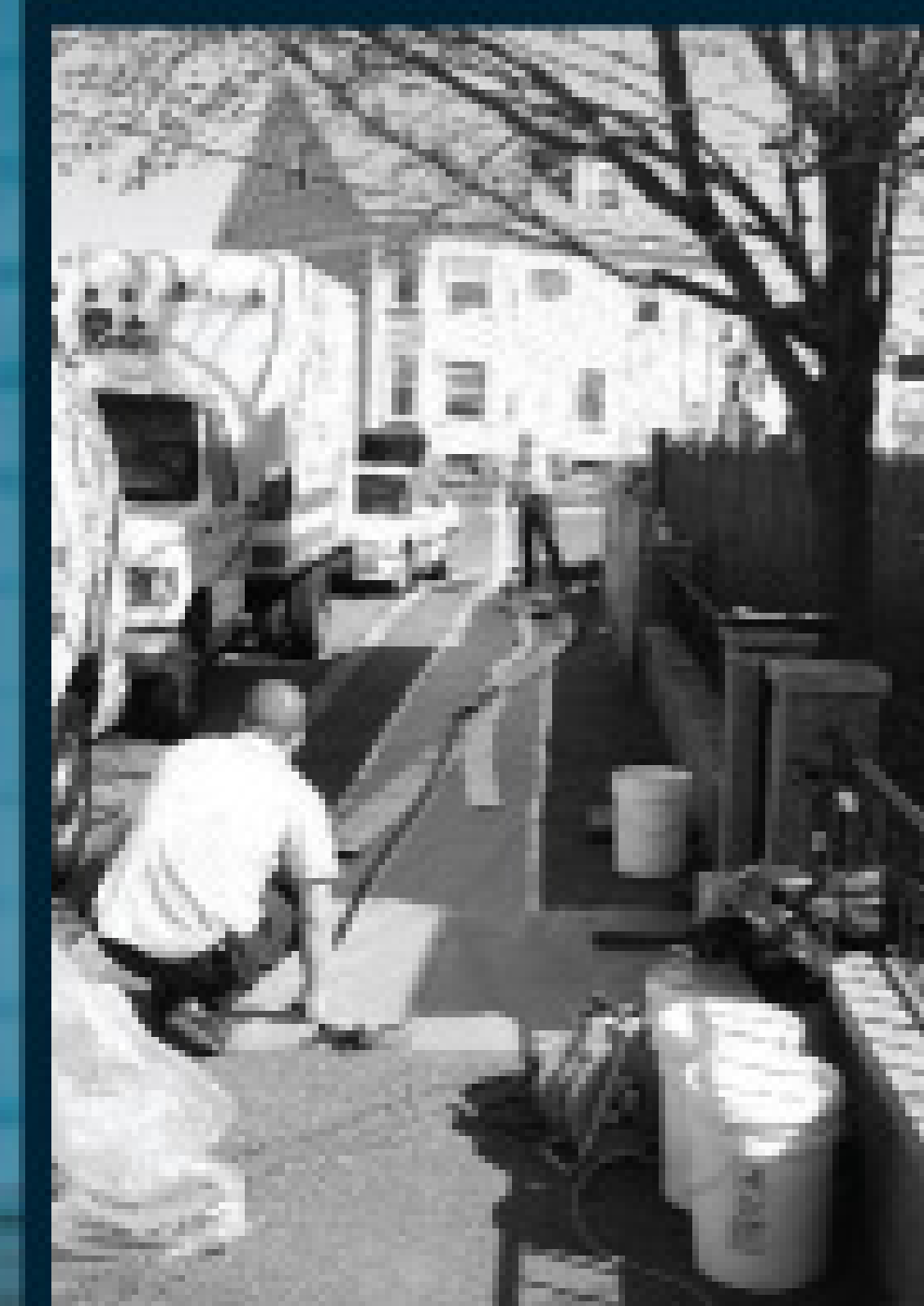
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Deep Reconnaissance

A pipe inspection camera does duty in the follow-up to a mine disaster

By Scottie Dayton

The collapse of the Crandall Canyon Mine in Utah last August killed six miners, then three rescue workers. The intense pressure on the coal pillars supporting the mine caused them to burst, sending coal and rock flying with explosive force.

After rescuers sent drop cameras down bore holes, they wanted a better view of the mine shaft. Inuktun Services Ltd. in Nanaimo, B.C., was contacted to build a robot that could descend more than a mile through 9-inch-diameter holes and crawl 300 feet.

Mechanical engineer Jeff Stanway and team designed a 19.5- by 8-inch chassis based on the Versatrax 150 crawler from Inuktun. They mounted an articulated arm with pan-and-tilt Spectrum 90 camera out the rear to



maintain a low profile. A Crystal Cam camera at the front monitored descent and landing. A 14.5-inch tether-control arm at the rear held the cable out of the way when the 70-pound robot reversed.

"Our control system for these components goes 1,500 feet, so we partnered with Ken Peligrin of PipeEye International in Las Vegas," says Stanway. Besides field experts, Peligrin supplied a 6,000-foot, fiber-



Only a 5/8-inch clearance separated the camera robot from the bore hole walls. Above (inset), a Crystal Cam camera illuminates the front of the robot, while an articulated arm with pan-and-tilt Spectrum 90 camera is mounted at the rear of the modified Versatrax 150 pipe inspection crawler.

optic tether with telemetry canister. Stanway connected it to 300 feet of soft tether attached to the robot.

On the first day, the clutch on the winch failed, and the robot free-fell until the camera jammed in the bore hole. Stanway repaired the soft tether and winch that night.

The robot was 10 feet from the bottom on the second day when shifting ground changed the channel to an impassible oval. "Rescuers had sent a drop camera down the hole, so this information was a bonus," says Stanway.

Lowered into a different hole on the third day, the robot landed in

front of a small mud pyramid. Two feet of coal, blown from the walls by the pressure of the mine collapsing, littered the floor. "The robot's 4-inch-high tracks weren't enough to navigate over the debris," says Stanway. "Then mud fell on the lens, and even with groundwater flowing past, we couldn't wash it off." This information also was important.

On the fourth day, the bore hole collapsed, burying the robot. "The experience was sobering. Anything put into that mountain, it took," says Stanway. ■

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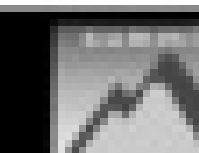
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Beside the Road

Horizontal directional drilling and special pipe enable installation of a new water main along a busy highway while keeping traffic flowing to businesses

By Scottie Dayton

Widening busy Ohio Route 170 to five lanes through the township of Calcutta involved moving utilities 15 feet beyond the path of two eastbound and three westbound lanes. Four major shopping plazas, several retail stores and restaurants line Dresden Avenue, serving shoppers from parts of Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio.

The Ohio Department of Transportation District 11 stipulated that at least one traffic lane always remain open in each direction to minimize business disruption. So Bert Dawson, P.E., Columbiana County engineer, specified horizontal directional drilling under driveways and parking lots, and trench cutting in open areas.

Dave Sugar of Dave Sugar Excavating Inc. in Petersburg, contractor for the county, subcontracted Chuck Kirk of Kirk Excavating in Columbus to help install the new 12-inch potable water main. Kirk focused on the directional drilling portion. A restrained joint PVC pipe with fittings that matched the city's 12-inch water mains became the key to an efficient job with little disturbance to the merchants.

"It took one day to bore through the shale, but we were well ahead of our completion deadline. It was more of an annoyance than a worry."

Chuck Kirk

Strong and rigid

Communicating with other contractors was critical. "As one of the last companies onsite, we had to be certain that everyone else finished their work before we started," says Kirk. "For example, the telephone poles had to be moved and the road paved before we arrived." The water



Assembly of a long run of Certa-Lok C900/RJ restrained joint PVC pipe was the exception. The 20-foot lengths were usually joined as they were pulled into the entrance pit.

main and gas line were relocated simultaneously.

The plans showed Kirk's men where to directional bore, and the stations were marked with stakes. Occasionally, one of them had to pothole using a shovel to find gas and telephone lines. "Most directional drilling was beneath driveways," says Kirk. "Whenever we hit an open area, we dug." Sugar's crew set up construction barrels and controlled traffic.

The pits, excavated in mostly clay with a John Deere backhoe, were 22 feet long by 8 feet deep by 4 feet wide to accommodate Kundel trench boxes. The PVC pipe — 1,670 feet of Certa-Lok C900/RJ with cast-iron O.D.s and 280 feet of Certa-Lok Yelomine from CertainTeed Corp. — was installed 6 to 9 feet deep, depending on the depth of utilities.

Dawson chose C900/RJ because it meets all performance requirements of AWWA C900 and eliminates concrete thrust blocks in properly engineered water systems. "PVC is

two and a half times stronger than HDPE, and is extruded with a thinner wall for a larger I.D. to maximize flow performance," he says. "The pipe also doesn't stretch during installation, then pull out of the couplings when shrinking back."

Other advantages were that the pipe did not require pre-fusing or heat-welding equipment. "Assembling the whole run was the exception," says Kirk. "Most often, we joined the 20-foot lengths as they were pulled into the hole."

Pipe and couplings have precision-machined grooves that, when aligned, lock together with an inserted nylon spline to form a circumferential restrained joint. Teflon-coated elastomeric O-rings in the couplings provide a reliable hydraulic pressure seal.

Down the hatch

One man ran the Ditch Witch JT4020 Mach 1 directional drilling machine while the other used a sonde to locate the boring head or clean up the mud with an HXX

TOUGH JOB

PROJECT:

Move 1,950 feet of water main and sewer 15 feet without disrupting traffic flow to businesses

CUSTOMER:

Engineering Office,
Columbiana County, Ohio.

CONTRACTOR:

Dave Sugar Excavating Inc.,
Petersburg, Ohio.

SUBCONTRACTOR:

Kirk Excavating, Columbus, Ohio

EQUIPMENT:

Certa-Lok C900/RJ and Yelomine pipe, CertainTeed Corp.; Valley Forge, Pa.; JT4020 Mach 1 directional drilling machine, Ditch Witch, Perry, Okla.; D36x50 Series II Navigator from Vermeer Mfg. Co., Pella, Iowa; 4-inch Aggressive Incredibit, Railhead Underground Products LLC, Weatherford, Texas

RESULTS:

New pipes installed with minimal disruption to businesses

Prodigy HydroExcavator from Vactor Manufacturing.

Boring through the clay was uneventful until the duo struck a horizontal layer of shale 400 feet long. Kirk brought his D36x50 Series II Navigator from Vermeer Mfg. and armed it with a 4-inch Aggressive Incredibit from Railhead Underground Products LLC. The drill head withstood the challenge, but a worn, 15-foot rod broke on the boring machine, setting progress back half a day.

The broken rod was removed, the remaining rods re-hooked, and the pull continued. While boring between two newly set telephone poles, one began to lean. Work stopped immediately and the utility company was notified. A crew arrived with a boom truck and held onto the pole as the Ditch Witch operator finished pulling back the reamer, then the pipe. Once the latter was in place, the telephone pole was stabilized.

It took six pulls of 280 to 450 feet to install the C900/RJ. Dave Sugar used standard waterline fittings to connect the new pipe to the city's water works. The 260 feet of 8-inch

Class 200 Certa-Lok Yelomine pipe for the sewer was installed in one pull using horizontal directional drilling and trench cutting. The SDR 17 pipe, which ran through an area with fewer driveways and parking lots, is rated for 160 psi.

Motorists continued their east and west journeys through Calcutta more slowly than usual but could always reach the stores and restaurants. Few realized that trenchless technology and restrained joint PVC piping had made it possible. ■

MORE INFO:

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Ditch Witch
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Kundel
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Railhead Underground Products LLC
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Vermeer Manufacturing Co.
888/837-6337
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Scott Heston of Kirk Excavating operates a Ditch Witch JT4020 Mach 1 directional drilling machine while co-worker Casey Applegate uses a sonde to locate the boring head.



The directional drilling machine bores through clay while traffic on Ohio Route 170 (Dresden Avenue) continues unimpeded.

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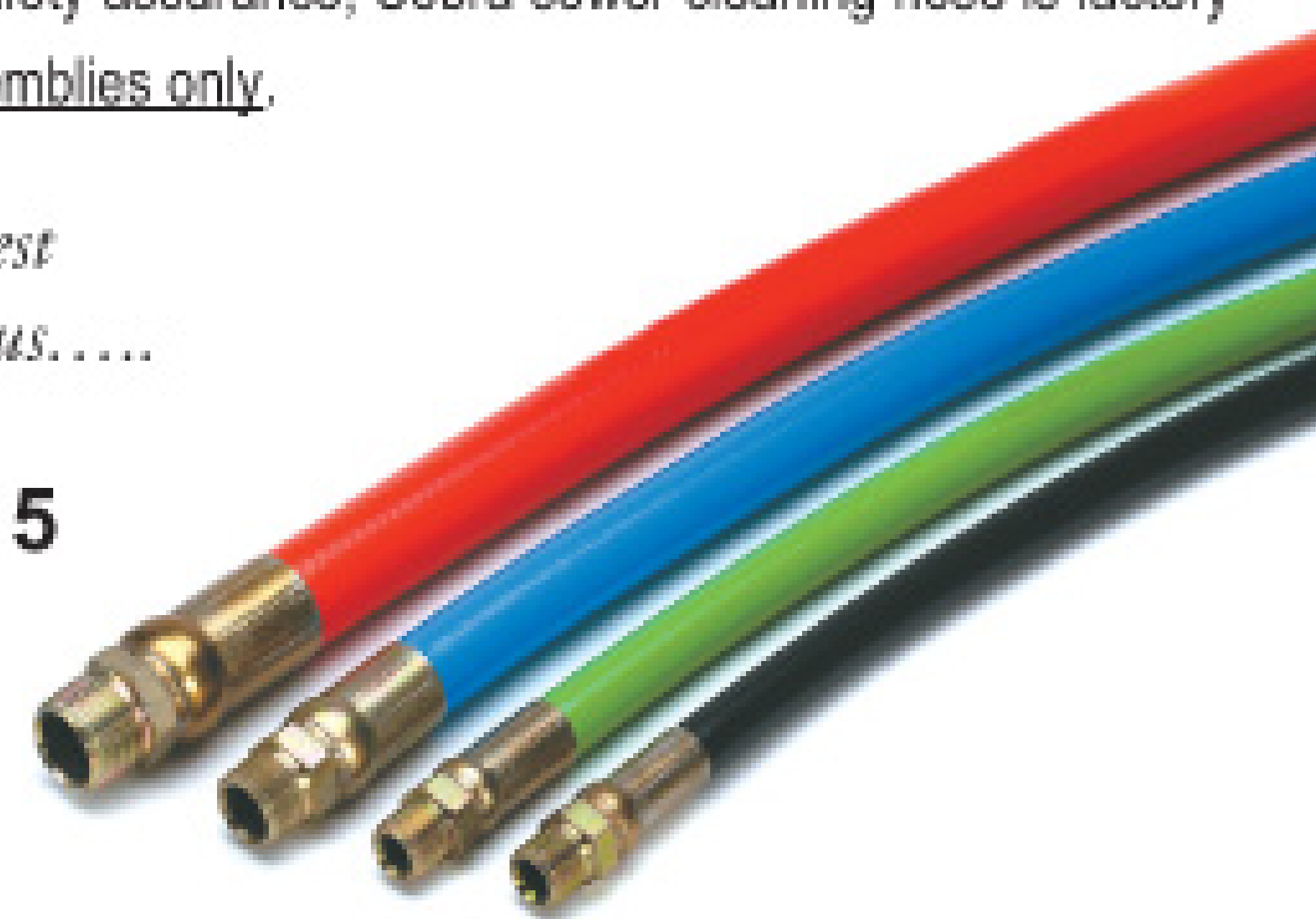


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Industry

NEWS

Federal Signal Opens Long Beach Solutions Center

Federal Signal Environmental Solutions Group has opened its fifth FS Solutions center. The Long Beach, Calif., center will stock high-performance parts and accessories for the company's Guzzler, Vactor and Jetstream brands, as well as other makes and models of waterblasters and vacuum loaders.



Router-Man Ranked Among Top 500 Franchises

Router-Man has been ranked 113 among the top 500 franchises by *Entrepreneur* magazine, and No. 1 in the plumbing category. Rankings are determined by cumulative scores in financial strength, stability, number of franchises, growth rate, years of operation, startup costs and company-provided financing.

USB-Duesen Receives ISO 9001:2000 Certification

Effective December 2007, USB-Duesen, parent company of USB-Sewer Equipment Corp., has been awarded the DIN EN ISO 9001:2000 certificate by the Bureau Veritas.



Brian Metcalf

Earth Tool Promotes Metcalf to CEO

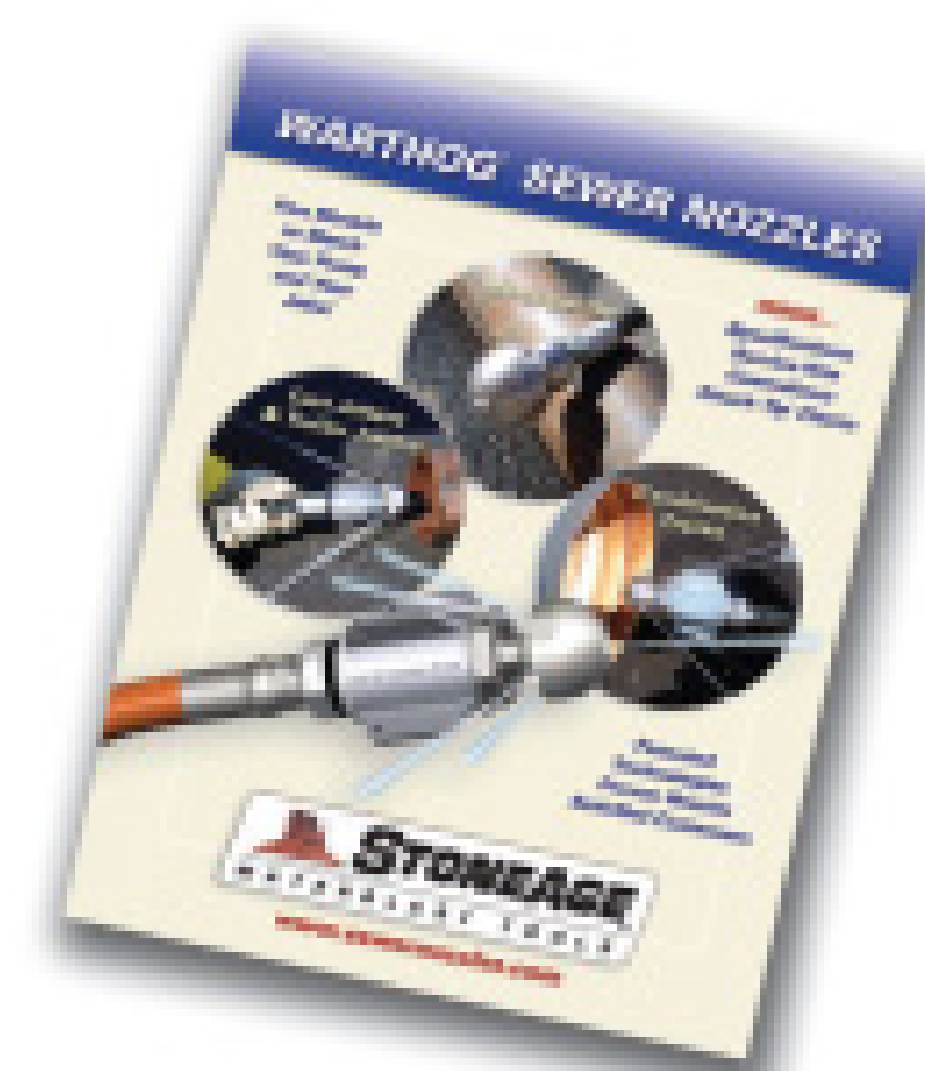
Brian Metcalf has been promoted to chief executive officer for Earth Tool Co., manufacturer of HammerHead products. Metcalf had been vice president of international sales and business development. He holds a degree in accounting from Drake University.

RIDGID Presents Video Contest

RIDGID is celebrating the launch of its new membership site (www.teamridgid.com) with a video contest, "How I Build my Reputation with RIDGID Tools." TeamRIDGID members are invited to record and post an original 1- to 3-minute video illustrating how they built their reputation. The contest ends April 30. Five finalists will receive an all-expense-paid trip to Cleveland, Ohio, to tour the RIDGID headquarters, while the grand prize winner will receive \$2,500 in RIDGID tools.

StoneAge Releases Warthog Catalog

The 16-page Warthog catalog from StoneAge Inc. is available in PDF format at www.stoneage.com/infocenter/index.html. The catalog includes jetting charts, tool breakdowns with each part identified, service kit components and available accessories. ■



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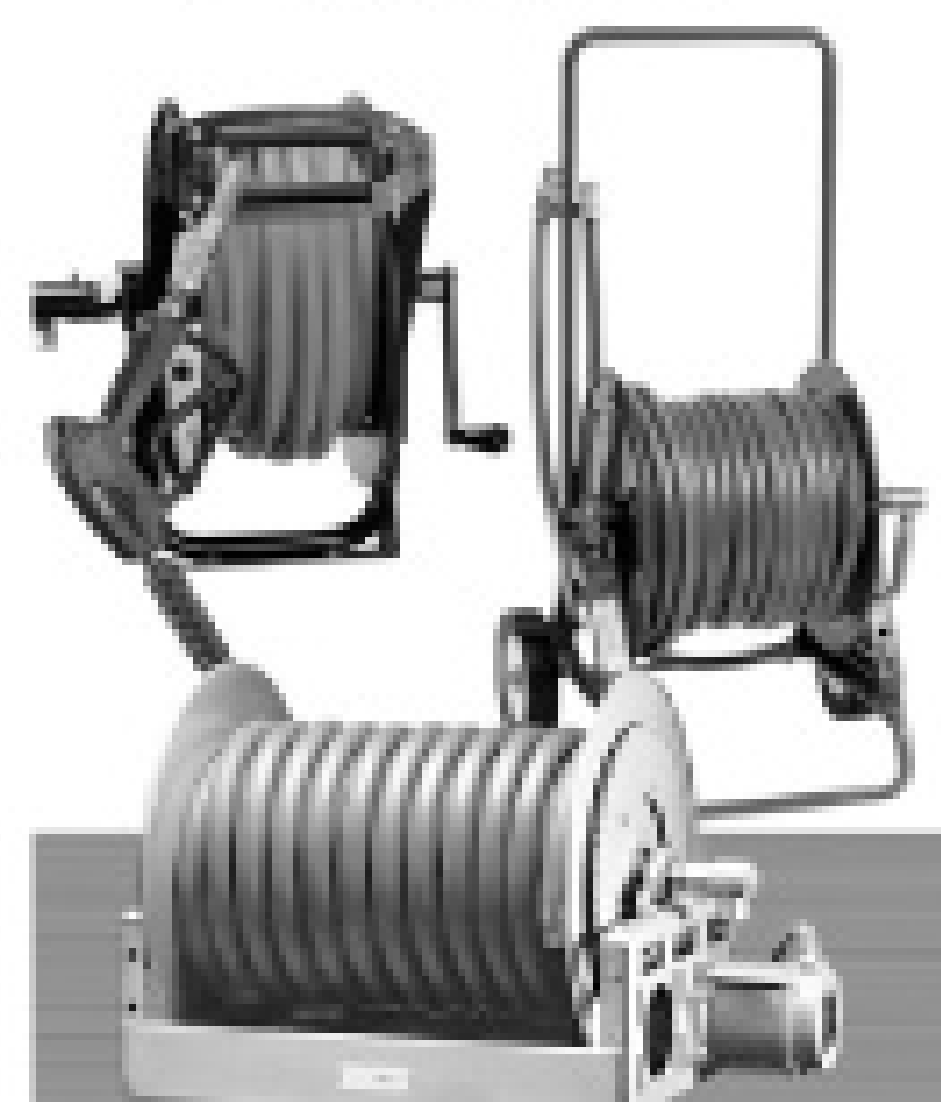
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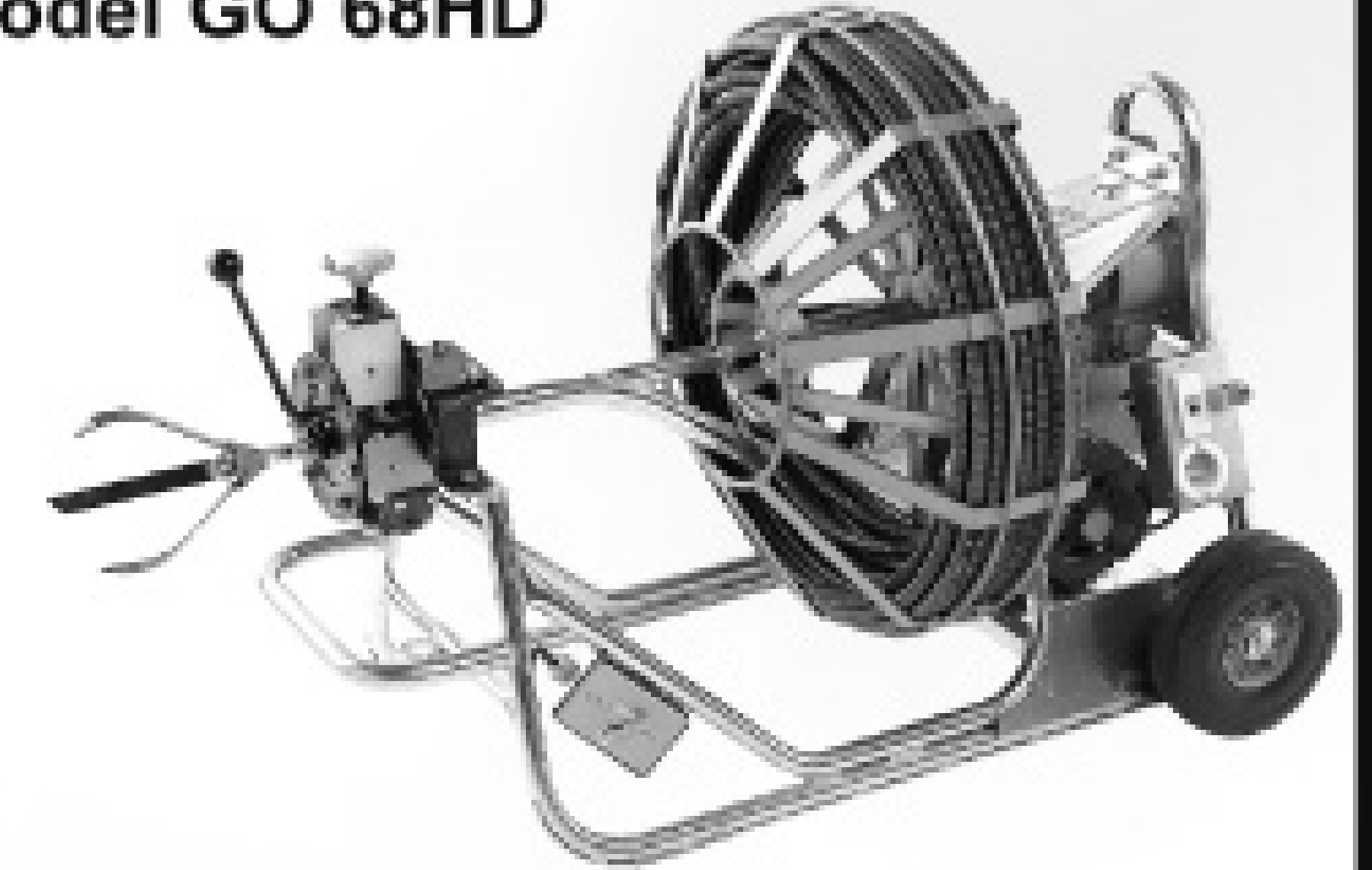
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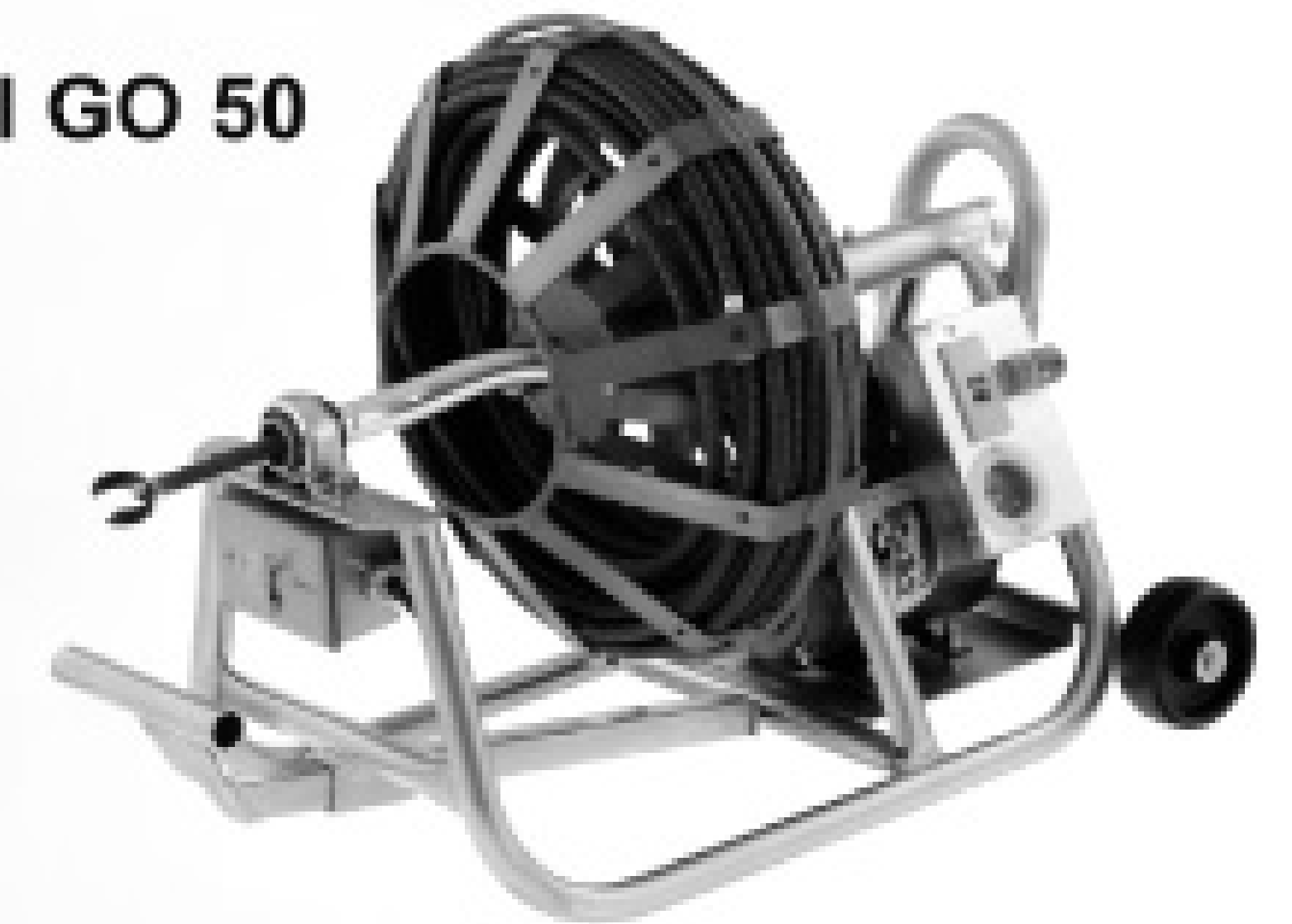
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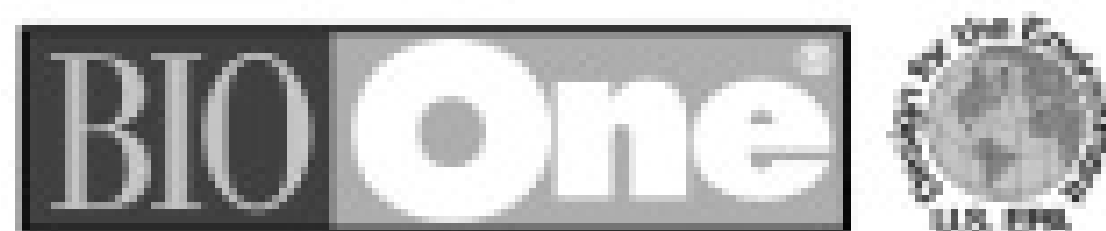
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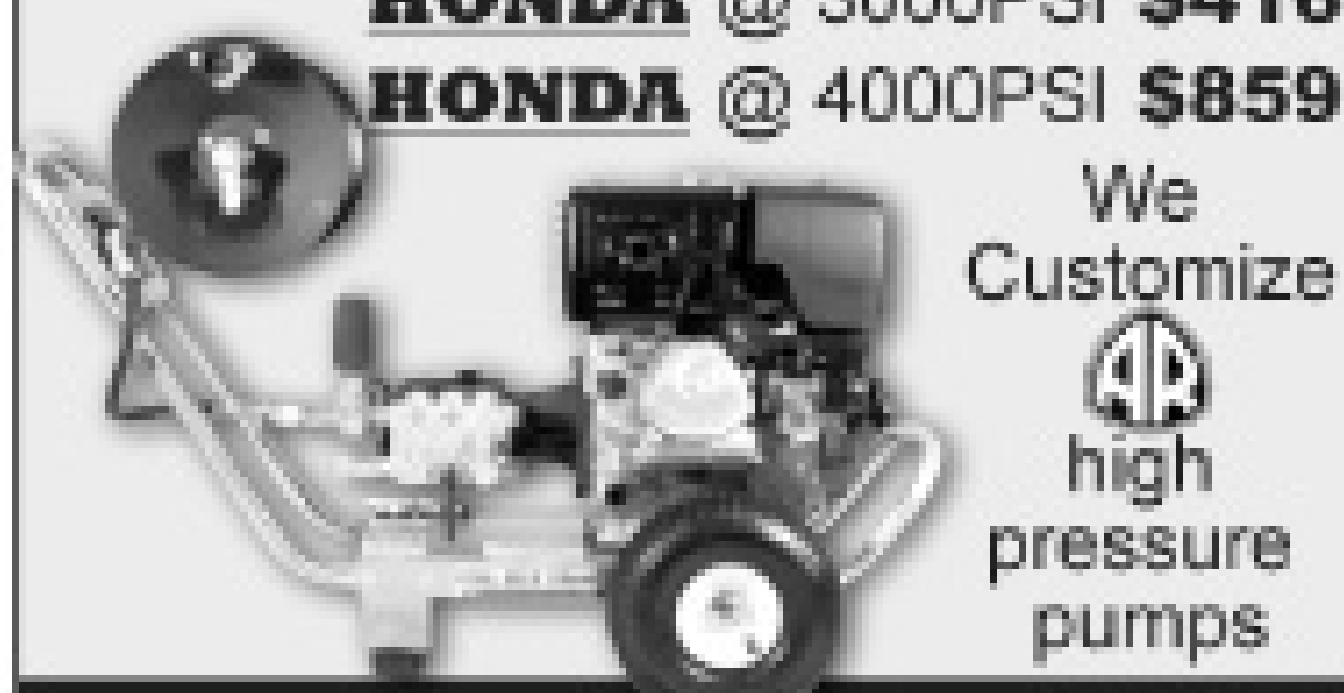
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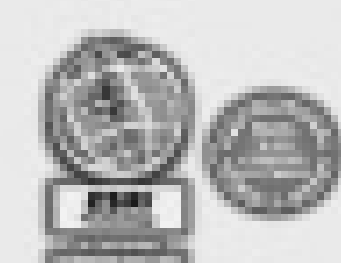
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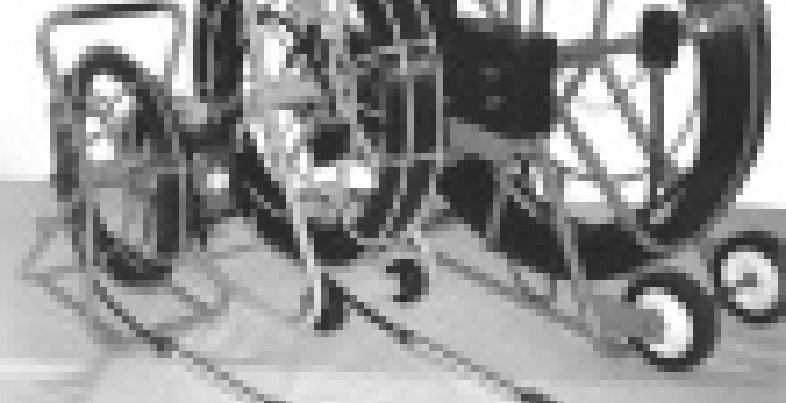
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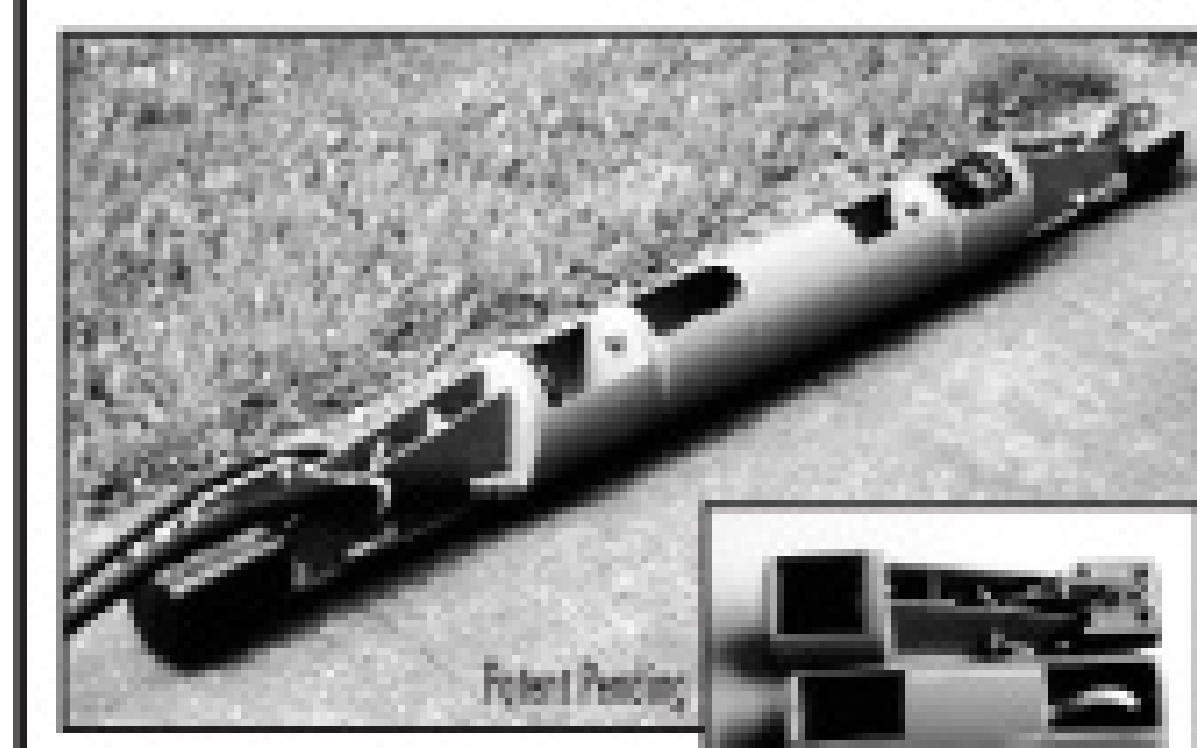


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K2 Portable Inspection System

The new K2 Series portable CCTV pipeline inspection system can be mounted in a range of vehicles, trailers, or used as a stand-alone system and includes an ergonomic hand-held control with a wireless option that operates all CUES transporters and cameras.



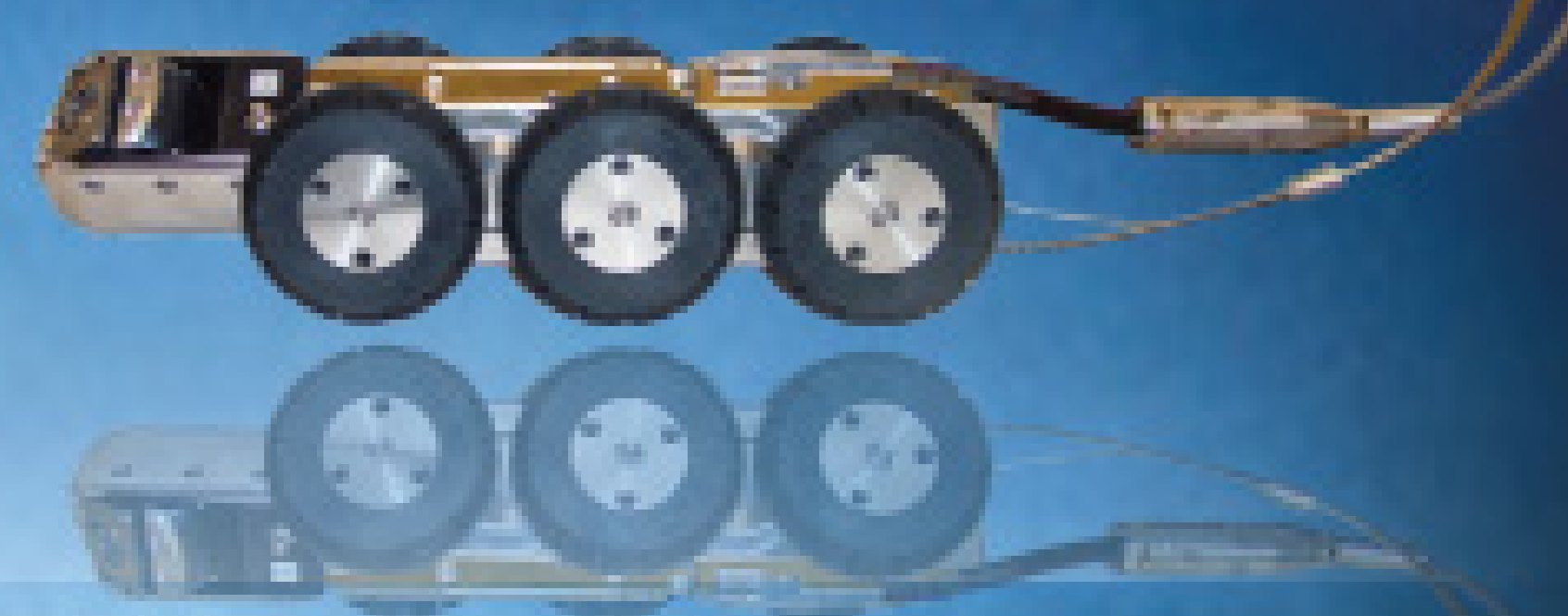
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Space-Saving Features Mark Camera Inspection System

By Ken Wysocky

Space-conscious drain cleaners will appreciate the all-in-one design of the Intruder Elite family of video inspection systems from Vision Technology Design & Manufacturing Inc.

The systems include an integrated monitor and detachable push-rod reels. The camera monitor is built into a lightweight frame and does not have to be carried separately to the job, says company president Jack Felix.

"We went down that road because technicians' trucks are becoming so crammed with equipment," Felix says. For technicians who find it difficult to view a monitor outdoors on a sunny day, the 7-inch, high-resolution LCD screen has a sun shield and LED brightness control. It provides a clear picture from any angle that is "as close

as you can get to glare-free," Felix says.

A picture inverter enables technicians to rotate upside-down images so they appear upright. The unit also has an on-screen footage counter and text writer. Users can choose an optional digital video recorder (DVR) or DVD recorder. Video footage can then be downloaded and e-mailed to a customer. The unit is compatible with any conventional video recording device, Felix notes.

The reel carries a 100-foot push rod with 1-inch-diameter micro camera head, or a 200-foot push rod with a 1.3-inch mini-camera head. The camera heads are available in black-and-white or color. The reels are detachable and interchangeable, enabling users to inspect 1- to 6-inch pipes.

A dual-frequency transmitter that broadcasts



Intruder Elite from Vision Technology Design & Manufacturing Inc.

at 512 HZ and 874 Hz works with any locator to pinpoint the location and depth of the camera head down to 12 feet. The unit runs on 12-volt DC power (with an AC wall adapter) or a built-in rechargeable battery that provides four hours of continuous use. **For information: 877/724-3435; www.vtdesign.com.**

General Pipe Introduces Lightweight J-2900 Jetter

The maneuverable Jet-Set J-2900 gas-powered waterjetter from General Pipe Cleaners weighs 173 pounds, offers 3,000 psi, and measures 25 1/2 inches long, 28 1/2 inches wide and 42 inches high. Powered by an 11-hp Honda engine, the unit features a 4-gpm triplex pump with Vibrapulse on demand. A 300-foot capacity hose reel with reel brake and brass swivel is mounted on a heavy-duty frame with two pneumatic tires. Safety features include a thermal relief valve, back-flow check valve and inlet filters. **For more information: 800/245-6200; www.drainbrain.com.**



QuickView Adds Accessory Package

Envirosight LLC has added an extended targeting leg, pole extensions and an updated display/recorder to its QuickView zoom inspection camera system. The adjustable carbon-filter targeting leg attachment enables users to inspect drop lines, while the 6-foot pole extension can add 6-18 feet of depth, enabling the camera to inspect manholes as deep as 48 feet. The camera's 7-inch color LCD video display provides nine times the pixel resolution of its previous 4-inch screen and has been updated to support high definition. The unit's memory card capacity also has been increased. **For more information: 866/936-8476; www.envirosight.com.**



RIDGID Extends Press Products Line

ProPress Rings from RIDGID are available in 1/2-, 3/4-, 1-, 1 1/4-, 1 1/2- and 2-inch sizes, enabling users to press connections in less accessible areas. The rings have a swivel design with 180-degree rotation for connection at almost any angle. Kits for pressing up to 4-inch bronze and copper fittings are available. **For more information:**

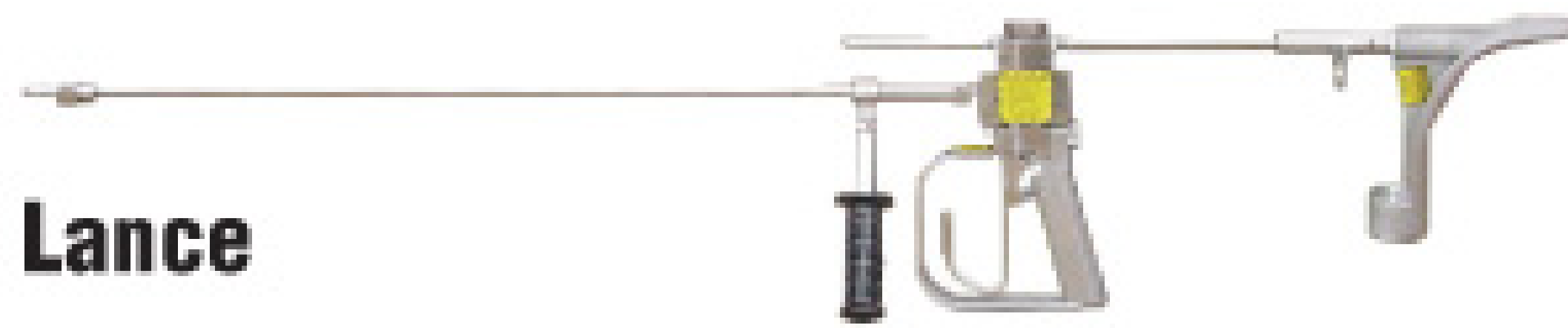
800/769-7743; www.ridgid.com.



Electric Eel Releases Counter-top Model

The CT counter-top cleaning machine from Electric Eel Manufacturing Co. Inc. offers a variable-speed motor for maximum cable control, and a power range of 75 to 350 rpm with constant torque. Designed to clean up to 50 feet of 3/4- to 2 1/2-inch drains, the unit features a 1/5-hp, 90-volt DC motor, stainless-steel drum and air-operated foot switch and cord assembly. It can run 1/4-, 5/16- and 3/8-inch cable. A hand-tighten Jacobs Chuck is standard, and a two-way auto-cable feed is available. **For more information: 800/833-1212; www.electriceel.com.**

NLB Offers UHP Waterjet Lance



The NCG40-286 ultra-high pressure waterjet lance from NLB Corp. delivers 40,000-psi and features a one-finger latch design to prevent accidental actuation and 60-second cartridge change. It weighs 13.5 pounds, and has an adjustable hand grip and shoulder stock. When used with the Viper 40 self-rotating head, it can produce rotating waterjet action without compressed air. **For more information: 248/624-5555; www.nlbcorp.com.**

Ace Supply Develops Mobile Vac Boom

Designed for hydro-excavating or vac-excavating, the Mobile Vac Boom flex-hose extension from Ace Supply attaches to a mini-excavator, excavator, skid-steer or backhoe, providing greater safety and more precise excavation. **For more information: 814/899-3644; www.mobilevacboom.com.**



Clear Computing Launches Centralized Reporting

Clear Computing has added centralized financial reporting for external divisions to its Total Activity Control operations management

system. The new feature enables users to access and run individual or combined reports, wherever they are located. Reports can be viewed, e-mailed or exported into Excel. **For more information: 888/332-5327; www.clearcomputing.com.**

Water Cannon Designs Undercarriage Attachment

The Mud Cannon undercarriage cleaner from Water Cannon attaches to a pressure washer hose and requires only 5 1/2 inches of clearance. Featuring a stainless-steel Mosmatic swivel and spray bar, the spinning 4-nozzle rotating assembly cleans an approximately 24-inch area. The unit has a telescoping handle and can withstand temperatures up to 195 degrees F, as well as almost any type of liquid chemical or acid solution. **For more information: 800/333-9274; www.watercannon.com.**



Ditch Witch Releases 250R/T Locating System

The 250R/T locating system from Ditch Witch is designed to locate and avoid buried telephone, CATV, power, gas and water lines. The unit features a 250T transmitter and 250R receiver. It offers intuitive controls, an easy-to-read display and depth estimation up to 15 feet. Tones are derived from the actual signals radiating from pipes or cables. The display is backlit and reinforced with a scratch-resistant coating for optimal visibility day or night. **For more information: 800/654-6481; www.ditchwitch.com.**

Duracable Introduces Upright Cable Cleaner



The DM 175 Gladiator cleaning machine from Duracable Manufacturing Co., comes with 100 feet of 3/4-inch cable and features a 1/2-hp motor with 10:1 gear ratio that operates at 145 rpm, 175 rpm or 215 rpm. The unit has a three-position adjustable handle that locks in place with a lanyard. The frame has an integrated toolbox and is balanced to prevent against "dancing," even with all the cable out. Stair climbers are standard, while horizontal support legs and loading wheels are optional. Swing bolts on each side of the head bearing allow for quick reel release. **For more information: 800/247-4081; www.duracable.com.** ♦

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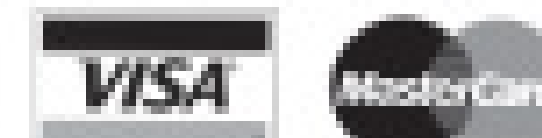
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