

At Fort Custer National Cemetery



Maintenance Crew Tests Biobased Products

There is nothing quite so impressive and moving as a veteran's cemetery with its rows of headstones and markers stretching across acres of carefully tended green lawn. The responsibility of caring for these sacred grounds belongs to the National Cemetery Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and their maintenance employees.

Tim Trittschuh is a mechanic at Fort Custer National Cemetery (FCNC), a 770-acre facility with more than 20,000 graves in south-central Michigan. Trittschuh and the maintenance crew use more than 90 pieces of equipment in their work of keeping the cemetery looking top-notch.

In 2006, he participated in one of a series of pilot projects using biobased products sponsored by the United Soybean Board (USB). Seeking ways to conserve oil in cemetery operations, Trittschuh was eager to try biobased products that were homegrown and less damaging to the environment.



photo credit: Official VA photo

Fort Custer
National Cemetery

Avenue of Flags at Fort Custer National Cemetery in Michigan.

“All of the products we’ve used have worked as well—or better—than their non-biobased counterparts, and the equipment they are used in (or on) is performing normally,” reports Trittschuh. “In fact, some of our 90-some pieces of equipment use more than one biobased product. Our backhoe operators have noticed that sticks used to maneuver hydraulic equipment feel tighter and smoother operating. They also say that the hydrostatic transmissions are working the same with biobased fluid as they did before and that operators have not reported any negative characteristics. In addition, operators have mentioned that engine performance is smoother with better idling and a small reduction in soot. The two-cycle engines, chainsaw bars and sprockets—all are performing well.”



One of the many jobs that must be done at a National Cemetery, of course, is preparing gravesites. Here backhoe operator Charlie Martin opens a grave using equipment running on biobased transdrdraulic oil and B20 biodiesel.

photo credit: Foreman FCNC Kenneth Haines

“One backhoe operator told me that the hydraulic filter clog light does not come on as much as it did with the petroleum-based hydraulic oil. He also mentioned that, overall, the hydraulic system seems to be getting ‘smoother’. But you can’t expect overnight results, it took a few operating hours for these benefits to take effect,” Trittschuh explains.

“We’re delighted to participate in this program,” says Environmental Program Specialist, VA Office of Acquisition and Materiel Management Barbara Matos who says they hope to introduce biobased products to other VA facilities once the pilot is done. “It’s good for the nation, the environment, for the economy, and, of course, biobased products are now part of a Federal preferential purchasing program.”



photo credit: Foreman FCNC Kenneth Haines

Fort Custer National Cemetery mechanic Tim Trittschuh adds biobased transdraulic oil to a tractor, which also runs on B20 biodiesel. It's one of the 90 pieces of equipment that use one or more biobased products, and run as well or better with them as compared to conventional products, according to Trittschuh.

FACT FILE

For more information on the use of biobased products at FCNC, contact Tim Trittschuh at tim.trittschuh@va.gov, Valerie Barlow at valerie.barlow@va.gov or Barbara Matos at barbara.matos@va.gov.

The following are the products used at FCNC:

From Renewable Lubricants www.renewablelube.com

Bio - Bar & Chain Oil™

Bio - TC-W3 Two-Cycle Engine Oil™

Bio-Trans-Hydraulic (Universal Tractor) Fluid™

Bio-Hydrostatic Fluid™

Bio-Power Winter Diesel Fuel Conditioner™

America’s farms are just beginning to tap their potential as a source for natural, renewable biobased products that offer benefits to worker health, the environment, America’s economy and energy security. To learn more about the many biobased products made from soybeans, such as those used at Fort Custer National Cemetery, go to www.soybiobased.org.

Because of the potential for biobased products to create new markets for soybeans, U.S. soybean farmers have invested millions of dollars to research, test and promote biobased products. Much of this work was done through the United Soybean Board (USB), which is composed of 64 U.S. soybean farmers appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to invest soybean checkoff funds. As stipulated in the Soybean Promotion, Research and Consumer Information Act, USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service has oversight responsibilities for the soybean checkoff.

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