

FOR RESIDENTIAL, MUNICIPAL AND INDUSTRIAL CLEANING CONTRACTORS

Cleaner®



Playing the Float

Camera boats or pontoons enable quality inspections of high-flow sewers

PAGE 70

MONEY MANAGER

Taking care of cash flow

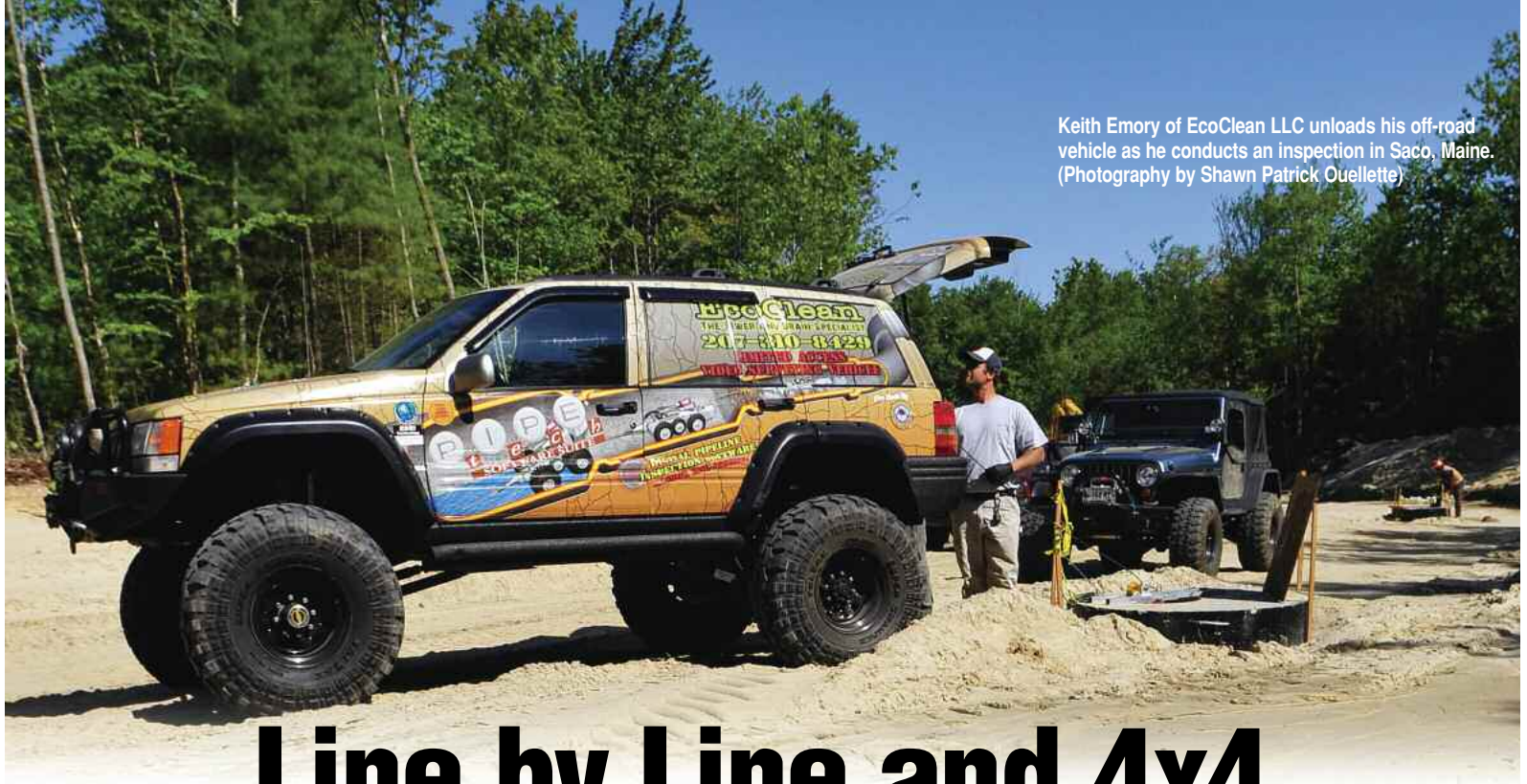
TOUGH JOB

Cleaning Seattle's Space Needle

MONEY MACHINES

Acme Powerwash, Phoenix, Ariz.

Keith Emory of EcoClean LLC unloads his off-road vehicle as he conducts an inspection in Saco, Maine. (Photography by Shawn Patrick Ouellette)



Line by Line and 4x4

EcoClean combines a strong traditional pipe-cleaning, inspection and repair business with a special aptitude for working off-road in rough terrain By Peter Kenter

Sewer and drain specialist EcoClean LLC of Portland, Maine, turns heads with its showpiece inspection vehicle, a tricked-out 1999 Jeep Grand Cherokee that can handle the toughest terrain.

But make no mistake, owner Greg Goan isn't selling customers on the truck. He's carving out a niche for himself as a contractor who will take on the toughest, most remote off-road jobs any customer cares to throw at him. Working the hard contracts is helping to build a reputation that Goan hopes will propel his business to a national concern.

Goan grew up around the business. His father started a drain-clean-

ing company in Detroit in 1948. "It wasn't something that really interested me," Goan recalls. "I grew up with it, then went to college and got a degree, and sat in an office for a few months, until I couldn't handle it any more.

"I was sick of the office and sick of living in a big city like Detroit. My brother had moved to Maine to start a family and I followed him out there in 2000."

Rugged terrain

The Detroit suburbs offer relatively tame terrain for drain cleaners. The same can't be said for Maine. With the Appalachian Mountains to the north, rugged beaches and coastline to the east, and cities and towns joined by roads that straddle rough terrain, forests, mud, sand and bogs, much of the state isn't easily accessible to the typical cleaning contractor.

vegetation. We're going to the places that never had a road, over rocks and hills and through creeks and gullies where equipment hasn't ventured for 50 years. If I had to rate some of these jobs on a scale of one to five, where five is the worst terrain I've ever seen, some of these are four-and-a-half's."

Goan's off-road truck was already built and needed only to be converted to business use, with the

"I was sick of the office and sick of living in a big city like Detroit. My brother had moved to Maine to start a family and I followed him out there in 2000."

Greg Goan

But Goan's new location suited his hobby and after-hours passion — driving off-road vehicles. Goan started EcoClean in 2004, combining a sewer- and drain-cleaning business with his hobby.

"It was a niche that nobody here was exploiting," he says. "Even contractors who offer to handle the tough jobs are only willing to travel where the roads are overgrown with

addition of specially designed drawers and mounts designed to house and protect sensitive equipment. Onsite, the rear hatch of the vehicle protects the equipment from the elements when it's raining or snowing.

He doesn't work by one off-road vehicle alone. A 1998 Jeep Wrangler provides support for the main vehicle, crashing through overgrown vegetation with rigid brush

PROFILE

ECOCLEAN LLC, PORTLAND, MAINE

OWNER:	Greg Goan
YEARS IN BUSINESS:	4
ANNUAL REVENUE:	\$750,000
MARKET AREA:	Maine, New Hampshire
EMPLOYEES:	5
SPECIALTIES:	Off-road inspection, inspection, cleaning, jetting & repair
WEB SITE:	www.ecoclean1.com





Company owner Greg Goan operates an Envirosight robotic crawler from inside a van during an inspection in Kennebunk, Maine.

bars and a plate-steel hull, taking it on the chin for the star. The support vehicle also contains spare parts, a compressor and a welder.

More than a niche

When the business opened, EcoClean received a few calls for off-road work, but many jobs still fell into traditional categories. “The business can’t survive on niche work alone,” says Goan. “We basically do anything that has to do with cleaning, inspecting, pipe bursting, relining, spot-lining, cabling, snaking and jetting – even unclogging a kitchen sink. The jetting and the spot-lining we can perform in remote locations.”

In addition to the two off-road inspection vehicles, the company owns one inspection van and two service vans. Among its arsenal of tools, the company offers:

- Three cable machines from Spartan Tool LLC.
- Two trailer-mounted jettors from Sewer Equipment Company of America.
- Two inspection camera-crawlers and one pole camera by Envirosight, LLC.
- A push camera by Pearpoint Inc.
- A RIDGID video probe.
- Pipe bursting equipment by Pipe Genie Manufacturing Inc.

- A trenchless PipePatch pipe repair system by Fernco Inc.
- An epoxy pipe liner by Nu Flow Technologies Inc.
- An underground utility locator from Prototek Corp.

To get himself started, Goan sent letters to the surrounding municipalities letting them know what he could do. Much of what followed was the result of word-of-mouth advertising that landed him contracts with customers including municipalities, private corporations and the U.S. Navy.

“If I had to rate some of these jobs on a scale of one to five, where five is the worst terrain I’ve ever seen, some of these are four-and-a-half’s.”

Greg Goan

Taking tough jobs

Four years later, off-road contracts comprise about 25 percent of EcoClean’s contracts by dollar value, although the niche work is intermittent. “About 80 percent of these contracts are jobs other contractors



A computer monitor inside the EcoClean inspection van shows the inside of a sewer line as viewed by crawler-mounted camera from Envirosight LLC.

can’t or won’t do, with the occasional sub-contract,” says Goan.

Most of the off-road work involves inspection and fiberglass spot repairs with occasional jetting. The inspection work is key because the owners of the infrastructure simply have no idea what they’ll find in pipes that haven’t been inspected in half a century. The inspection work must precede any further decisions.

A case in point is a contract for the City of Portland, where sewer lines 40- to 50-years-old located outside of town required inspection. “At least two of the lines were so remote that they had never had a truck in there to begin with,” says Goan. “The last vehicles to see the area were heavy excavators during original construction, and the only living beings we meet are moose and turkey, though they never give us any trouble.”

Actually finding the location of remote infrastructure is part of the challenge of the off-road jobs. Ancient maps aren’t always accurate, and five or six decades can make an enormous difference in terrain that’s always changing.

SNOW BUSINESS, SHOW BUSINESS

A big Maine nor'easter that dumped 3 feet of snow last winter put an emergency jetting job beyond the reach of a traditional service van owned by EcoClean LLC. The trouble was, that van contained the equipment and hauled the jetting trailer required to complete the job.

That’s when owner Greg Goan looked to the company’s signature vehicle: a 1999 Jeep Grand Cherokee built for the toughest off-road inspection jobs. “We devised a unique solution to get the job done,” says Goan. “We hooked the jetting trailer to the van, then hooked the van to the back of the Jeep and pulled them both like a single trailer all the way to the job in Cape Elizabeth, then hauled them all the way back.”

The roundtrip through the vicious storm took about 50 minutes, not much more than might be expected during ideal conditions. “When it comes to getting the job done, we don’t mess around,” says Goan.

But rubberneckers occasionally cause some grief. “The big Jeep is almost annoying to drive because everyone from 5-year-olds to 90-year-olds wants to stop and look at it,” he says. “It was funny at first, but not any more. Sometimes we can’t even switch lanes because someone is driving up beside it to take photographs.”



Keith Emory lowers an Envirosight camera and robotic crawler into a sewer line during an inspection.

“Brush and forests grow thicker, and erosion and streams take their toll on the land,” says Goan. “In many cases, there are no maps. The first part of these jobs is to sit down with the city engineers and their staff to look at where the infrastructure might be located.” Using GPS information and aerial photos, Goan works out the approximate locations of manholes and other checkpoints before heading into the field.

“They want this to work,” says Goan. “If we can’t make it in, they only have a limited number of alternatives. They can leave the pipes alone and do nothing at all, or they can build roads and bridges through the terrain to get regular vehicles to the checkpoints.”

Environmental contracts

Some of the off-road inspection work involves environmental contracts. “We go into places like old mills or industrial facilities to do the televising and infrastructure location

for them, in preparation for a site cleanup,” says Goan. Some old industrial sites contain mercury and oil spills. Other off-road work involves new developments, such as new subdivisions or potential industrial sites.

“We offer extreme inspection services, but sometimes our clients still underestimate just how extreme we are.”

Greg Goan

EcoClean employs five people, one in the office and four in the field, including two part-timers. Goan expects all field hires to have a specific skill set. “It’s a bonus if they have the experience to do the ordinary work that’s the bread and butter of the company,” he says. “But I’m looking primarily for people with a strong work ethic who will stick with the program and complete all the jobs that come our way. I want problem-solvers. But they also



Emory (left) and Greg Goan prepare to head out on an off-road inspection.

need to have interest in the niche work – the off-road portion. If they’re not into it, I’d rather give the truck to someone who wants to handle it.”

A new employee is given a trial by fire at the Navy and Marine Corps Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) training school at the Naval Air Station in Brunswick, Maine. “That’s a trip we take every year to go and play,” says Goan.

“You have all of the different classes of off-road vehicles going, and you can see what each type of vehicle can or can’t do in a particular situation. It’s a great learning experience because someone without that specialized experience may get a vehicle stuck. The experts will get into that same vehicle and show them how to get out of it.”

Incorporating off-road work into the business doesn’t have any major drawbacks, says Goan. “Even the insurance on the off-road vehicle is cheaper than the insurance on my on-road televising van,” he says.

Looking to franchise

Maine has the distinction of bordering just one other state (New Hampshire), but Massachusetts, Vermont and Connecticut are close

by. Goan looks forward to franchising the extreme aspects of his business – all the off-road services – nationwide as part of a five-year plan. “Have equipment, will travel,” he says.

He continues to spread the word on the type of extreme jobs his inspection vehicles can handle through mailers, the Yellow Pages and radio spots. “We recently handled a contract for the Town of Bath, where they build Navy destroyers,

and we were met with a bunch of municipal workers with chain saws who were dressed as though they were going to help us get through the woods,” says Goan.

“We just laughed and told them to relax and put away the equipment. We offer extreme inspection services, but sometimes our clients still underestimate just how extreme we are.” Maintaining a balance between the extreme and the traditional keeps EcoClean in the black, while its owner focuses on a more specialized future. ■

MORE INFO :

Spartan Tool LLC

800/435-3866
www.spartantool.com

Sewer Equipment Co. of America

800/323-1604
www.sewerequipment.com

Pearpoint

760/343-7350
www.pearpoint.com

RIDGID

800/769-7743
www.ridgid.com

Fernco Inc.

810/653-9626
www.fernco.com

Prototek Corp.

800/541-9123
www.prototek.com

Envirosight LLC

866/936-8476
www.envirosight.com

Pipe Genie Manufacturing Inc.

877/411-PIPE
www.pipegenie.com

Nu Flow

800/834-9597
www.nuflowtech.com