

## **Holding Tank 'Brew' or Septic System Glue?**

*Woodall's Campground Management, April 1996*

Several campers have asked about using homemade holding tank solutions that they've mixed together from household chemicals. They say their products are cheaper and just as good as commercially produced holding tank chemicals. One camper even asked me to print his "recipe" in the campground newsletter so that our other guests could benefit from it. Is giving them permission to use these concoctions advisable? What about printing the recipe?

A number of campground operators recently inquired about the advisability of allowing campers to use homemade holding tank mixtures that will eventually find their way into a park's septic system.

We contacted Jim Harrison, JWH Distributing, Santa Rosa, CA., the distributor of Eco-Save bacteria-based holding and septic tank chemicals, and asked him to answer these inquiries. His reply follows.

Many RV and campground magazines and newsletters periodically receive "home brew" recipes for RV holding tank mixtures that will supposedly save campers money and work just as well as commercial products. These mixtures supposedly control odors and keep holding tanks working properly. Many of them contain bleach or other bactericides.

Most of these recipes are created by well meaning campers who very often have little background in chemistry. A better understanding of this science could warn them that some of the ingredients in these "recipes", when mixed together, create poisonous or corrosive solutions or produce fumes that might prove fatal to people using the mixture.

Some of the mixtures, I've heard about would be very hard on fittings and holding tank materials and could lead to premature failure of the holding tank. For example, bleach, a very popular ingredient in many of these recipes, can cause plastic to become brittle and break within a year or two.

Because they kill bacteria, such homemade mixtures can interfere with the proper functioning of a park's sewage treatment system which depends upon bacterial action to breakdown solids and waste materials. Homemade solutions containing ammonia or other chemicals with nitrogen can release nitrates into the soil after they break down and pass through the septic system. Nitrates in the soil eventually could reach the park's aquifer and contaminate it.

Finally, I doubt that there would be much, if any, cost savings to an individual camper. In addition to the mess that could result from mixing the chemicals, a camper is faced with the problem of storing the "home brew" once it's compounded.

I'm also concerned that a park operator could become a defendant in a lawsuit if he or she prints a "recipe" which harms the people who use it or damages their RV holding tank. I was going to write "costly lawsuit" but realized that would have been redundant.