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Root Foaming Showcases Company's One-Stop Shop Approach

The tactic for preventing tree roots from growing in sewer lines is Nor-Cal Pipeline Services' latest venture as it aims to offer customers as many service options as possible

By Ken Wysocky

Offering customers as many services as possible has been critical to growth at Nor-Cal Pipeline Services, a hydroexcavation, trenchless pipe rehab and sewer cleaning/inspection company based in West Sacramento, California.

So when Dave Jaeger Jr. heard about root foaming — a process that kills tree roots and prevents them from regrowing in sewer lines — it made perfect sense to add it to the company's roster of services last year. After all, some municipal customers were already hiring other companies to do the same thing, so why not get into the game and make Nor-Cal even more of a one-stop shop for clients?

"There aren't a lot of people around here doing root foaming, plus it seemed like a natural fit for what we already do," says Jaeger, vice president and co-owner of the company along with his father, Dave Jaeger Sr.

Nor-Cal partnered with RootX, which makes the root-killing chemical and equipment to apply it — a leader hose and foam-dispersal unit called the FDU 300 and a jetter nozzle that attaches to the FDU.

To use RootX, California contractors must obtain two different licenses. But overall, the startup costs are fairly minimal, Jaeger says. Applying the foaming agent is easy and much faster than cutting out roots with a jetting nozzle.

"It could take us all day to cut through roots in a section of sewer line," Jaeger says. "But we can foam thousands of feet of sewer lines a day. All you do is attach the FDU nozzle and pull it back at certain speed, based on the diameter and length of the pipe. The FDU unit leaves a trail of foam behind it that fills the entire pipe."

According to data from RootX, it should take about 10 minutes to foam a 300-foot-long line from manhole to manhole. Typically the foam — which is sold as a powder in bags — must be applied annually for the first two years, then every two years after that. As a result, there's a recurring-revenue component, too, Jaeger says.

Here's a basic rundown of how it works: After parking a water jetter or a combination vacuum truck at a downstream manhole, jet the nozzle over to the next upstream manhole. Then remove the nozzle from the hose and attach the RootX leader hose.



Next, set up the included loading tripod over the upstream manhole, then lock the FDU 300 dispenser into it. Then mix a bag of RootX thoroughly by removing a twist-tie in the middle of the bag; this allows two separate chemicals to mix as the bag is rocked back and forth. When the chemical is a uniform gray color, pour it into the FDU 300 by using a device called the chemical-transfer tube.

When the bag is empty, remove the transfer tube and bag and attach the included applicator nozzle to the FDU 300 device. Then remove the application device from the tripod, attach it to the jetter hose, lower it into the manhole, turn on the water supply, and start reeling the nozzle back to the downstream manhole. **c**