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A Contractor's Perspective on Sanitary Sewer Manhole Rehabilitation

Insights from William Friedah, PE of Utility Services Group

According to William Friedah, a 20-year veteran of the trenchless industry, 90% of the time, sanitary sewer manhole rehabilitation is more cost-effective than replacement. Below are key considerations that contractors should keep in mind when approaching manhole rehabilitation projects.

1. Assessing the Situation:

Before starting any manhole rehabilitation project, it's crucial to ask the right questions in order to get to the heart of the problem. A thorough site visit is essential, which can include assessing access, conducting a camera inspection, and evaluating the location (e.g., residential vs. creek bed). Access can often dictate the choice of products, so understanding what's important for the project is key to selecting the right solution.

2. Key Product Features:

When choosing a product for manhole rehabilitation, experience and a proven track record are essential. In-field conditions can differ significantly from lab tests, so product knowledge and technical support are crucial for success. Contractors should prioritize products backed by strong supplier support and access to technical resources.

3. Application Efficiency:

The flexibility of the product and quick curing times can have a major impact on the overall cost of the project. Labor is the largest expense in manhole rehabilitation, so even if a material is slightly more expensive, its quicker application time can lower the overall project cost. Efficiency in the application, such as faster curing and a longer recoat window, can also reduce the amount of labor required. Labor costs will continue to rise over time, so investing in efficient, fast-application products and equipment can offer long-term savings.

4. Automation vs. Manual Labor:

While the trend of unmanned/automated rehabilitation is on the rise, there is no replacement for quality manual labor in many situations. Automated systems are best suited for standardized, straightforward rehabilitation jobs but may not provide the full lifecycle benefits that proper on-site labor can deliver in more complex scenarios. Manual approaches allow for real-time adjustments and quality control that automated systems cannot match. Having skilled workers who can make immediate changes ensures that the project remains on track and that the final results meet high standards, particularly in uniquely challenging manholes.

5. Training & Certification:

A solid training program is essential for achieving high-quality results in manhole rehabilitation. Utility Services Group partners with trusted entities such as sales representative Atlantic Coating Solutions and product manufacturer Epoxytec to ensure that all applicators receive consistent training and certification through their ECAN (Epoxytec

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Certified Applicator Network) program. This consistent training process, coupled with strong supplier support, allows contractors to confidently apply the product, ensuring it's used effectively in real-world applications and for the protection of the client.

6. Surface Preparation:

Proper surface preparation is arguably the most critical part of the rehabilitation process. Even the best products will fail if the surface is not properly prepped. Experience and training are essential to this phase. Contractors often spend twice as much time preparing the surface as they do on the rehabilitation itself. Failing to prep correctly can lead to costly mistakes. Repairs and re-coating of improperly rehabilitated manholes can cost 2-3 times more than doing it right the first time.

7. Partnerships & Consistency:

Successful rehabilitation requires collaboration among consultants, vendors, and contractors. Building strong partnerships helps ensure that all moving parts work together seamlessly to deliver the best results for the customer. Consistency in approach is crucial to maintain business relationships and to guarantee smooth project execution.

8. No Two Manholes Are Alike:

While theoretical knowledge and lab results are valuable, the true test of a product and technique comes in the field. Every manhole is different, and what works in one situation may not be suitable for another. The combination of experience, product knowledge, and the right tools is essential for ensuring a successful rehabilitation project.

Manhole rehabilitation represents a significant opportunity for cost savings over full replacement when approached correctly. Success in this field requires a comprehensive understanding of site conditions, careful product selection, efficient application techniques, and proper surface preparation. By investing in quality training, building strong partnerships, and recognizing the unique challenges of each project, contractors can deliver rehabilitation solutions that provide long-term value and performance for their clients.

Interested in learning more about optimizing your manhole rehabilitation projects?
Contact our team of experts at Epoxytec.

