

# Street Sweeping Dispelling the Myths

As a company we sweep over 150 private communities each month. We have been in business since 1953 and our President is a past president of the National Contract Sweepers Association. We have also received American Sweepers Magazine's "Award of Excellence in Sweeping". Only four companies nation wide have received this honor.

We mention this to establish our credentials in this industry knowing there will be those whose understanding of street sweepers runs contrary to the following information. Unfortunately, myths told often enough and long enough are often assumed fact.

Street Sweeping in this country is generally accepted to have been started by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia over 200 years ago. In the late 1890's New York City first started using crews of men in white uniforms to manually remove the debris.



1910



1920's

The first self-propelled mechanical sweeper was used in Boise, Idaho, in 1914; and a vacuum sweeper was first utilized in the 1920's.

While the machines have changed considerably over the years their basic mechanical function has remained unchanged.



1930's

The goal of sweepers from kitchen size to street size, is to lift debris off a surface and deposit it into a hopper. This is accomplished one of two ways:



1940's

#1 Use a broom to "flick" the debris into the hopper (like your kitchen broom and dust pan) or "flick" the debris onto a conveyor that carries it into the hopper.

#2 Use air or a vacuum to lift the debris into the hopper. (again, just like your home vacuum only bigger)

While there have been dozens of sweeper manufactures and hundreds of models over the years, they all share one of these two methods. There is no "third" method. The same technology you use at home is used on the street.

***The myth we would like to dispel once and for all, is that sweepers use water for cleaning, or that the water used by sweepers somehow helps the cleaning process. The fact is: Sweepers use water for dust control only. The water does no cleaning of any kind.***

This goes for all sweepers, from all manufactures all the way back to Benjamin Franklin.

Our theory as to why this myth is perpetuated is the very common use of the Mobil Broom (a brand name) street sweeper in Southern California. This sweeper uses a spray bar on the front of the machine to wet the street prior to sweeping. The water is very visible and leaves a familiar wet "sweeper track or trail". Nevertheless, the water is for dust control only.



1950's

Many people mistakenly assume these sweepers put down lots of water, the brushes somehow scrub the street and the dirty water is then sucked up into the machine. Unfortunately, there has never been a street sweeper that works this way.



Dust Control Water

Small indoor warehouse “scrubbers” do operate this way, however they have never been adapted to handle the amount of debris encountered on a street.

To further dispel the myth, imagine if you dropped a cup of flour on the floor, would you wet it before sweeping or vacuuming it up? Of course not. Remember this is the same basic technology used on the street where water actually hurts the cleaning.

All modern sweepers still use water, and they all still use it only for dust control. The familiar Mobil Broom sweeper of which we have had dozens, is slowly giving way to modern Regenerative Air sweepers. In fact AQMD has decreed that cities may no longer buy sweepers that do not pass a strict PM10 dust control test. Most broom machines have trouble with this test.



“Mobil” Broom Sweeper

Private communities will soon be under the same regulations, but that is okay, as air machines clean better on HOA streets anyway. (Note: Air machines can still have the all steel gutter brooms needed to sweep debris from the gutters)

Since Regenerative Air machines don’t leave a familiar “trail” it is often assumed they don’t use water. Actually they use just as much. They use a fine mist targeted at the gutter brooms and inject more water inside the sweeper where it is most effective at knocking down the dust. This also avoids wetting the debris making it harder to pick-up.



Regenerative Air Sweeper

Just like having your kitchen floor or driveway dry, having the street dry will allow the sweeper to do the best job possible.

Unfortunately with the advent of automatic lawn timers, many private community streets have their gutters wet most of the time. This mud and sometimes algae is impossible to handle without some residual staining. This staining frequently elicits the comment that the sweeper “did not use enough water”. Hopefully you now know just the opposite is true.

Street sweepers are not magical machines. Complicated, big, noisy, powerful and expensive yes, but not magical. What you can do with your kitchen broom or vacuum cleaner we can do more, but not necessarily better.

You now know more about sweepers than 95% of the population, and undoubtedly more than you ever wanted to know. Next time someone suggests the sweeper needs to use more water, please pass this on or at least drop some flour on their floor!

Your questions and comments are welcome.

**Bill's Sweeping Service, Inc.**  
**[www.streetsweeper.com](http://www.streetsweeper.com)**



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