



SETTING A STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

For Southern California's West-Tech Contracting, it's all about the details

Rick Engebretsen prefers to offer his clients the complete package. A heavy civil contractor with 28 years' experience, the owner of West-Tech Contracting Inc. knows he can deliver convenience and value for his customers.

As a second-generation contractor with a degree in finance from San Diego State University, Engebretsen had the right combination of experience and knowledge to operate a construction firm in the complex regulatory environment of Southern California, and he incorporated West-Tech in 1991 in Escondido. What began as Engebretsen Contracting in the 1970s today offers a variety of services that include demolition, excavation, grading, and wet utilities. West-Tech also tackles all types of hazardous material transportation and disposal. It's a mix of services that makes them

invaluable to a range of clients that include large contractors, commercial builders, governments, engineering firms, oil companies, and military installations.

Seeing the potential for synergy between the three divisions – Demolition and Environmental Services, Sitework, and Underground Construction – an idea formed. Engebretsen felt the capabilities could be combined and merged in a way to better manage the project schedule and process.

Seizing on the opportunity, Engebretsen began providing comprehensive turnkey-style packages to his customers. "We've been able to successfully create full civil packages and the clients like that," Engebretsen says. "It

allows us to create value for them with the schedule."

For example, for projects underway at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, West-Tech is able to compatibly schedule underground and sitework to shave time off the overall project timeline.

The best tool for the task

With 150 employees and a 115-piece fleet, using the turnkey approach allows West-Tech to eliminate the need to manage multiple subcontractors for construction and environmental services, delivering projects on budget. The budgeting process is one step in the project lifecycle Engebretsen views as a critical way to stay at the top of his game.

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Rick Engebretsen, owner of West-Tech Contracting



“We do a great job at pricing,” he says. “Our estimators are extremely thorough, and we provide them with the best tools they can use to get the job done.”

Having the best tool for the task at hand is a strategy West-Tech employs throughout their operation. If the packages they create for their clients are to work well for them, remaining on or ahead of schedule – and avoiding downtime – is important. That’s why Russ Bennett, who runs West-Tech’s maintenance division, has the highest of standards when it comes to the company’s equipment. Between the demolition, earthworks, and underground divisions, their machines have to dependably perform under demanding conditions, every day.

Two of the weapons in West-Tech’s arsenal are the Hitachi ZW180-6 and ZW310-6 wheel loaders. Purpose built with versatility and productivity in mind, the 180 excels at reducing downtime and is a perfect choice for West-Tech’s fleet. The 173-horsepower, 3.4-cubic-yard machine operates reliably and efficiently in loading and dumping applications across West-Tech’s range of jobs. The 310, a 285-horsepower, 5.5-cubic-yard-model, is versatile for its durable construction with heavy duty structural features, making the loader a great selection for high production applications.

One feature that sets the machines apart is the elimination of a diesel particulate filter, thanks to the Tier 4 Final certified engine with a maintenance-free high-volume cooled EGR system and diesel oxidation catalyst. The convenience of a non-DPF machine not only saves time for maintenance personnel, but lowers overall operating costs. Efficiency is also enhanced through advanced telematics. Remote monitoring systems enable comparing the ratio of operating and non-operating hours, analyzing fuel consumption, and provide an automatic service report.

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Building relationships

Because the machines are durable, they don’t have to call their dealer frequently, Bennett says. “The quality of the build, plus how we maintain the machines, keeps us from needing to call often.” When they do call, however, Jeff Jones of Westrax Machinery responds immediately, a quality that Engebretsen finds vital.

“Our relationship with our dealer is critical,” he says. “In the past, it can and has deterred us from buying a machine. We want a dealer who responds and listens to us.”

Westrax Machinery, a premier dealer for new and used equipment sales, service, and parts, began in Long Beach and now serves all of Southern California. Jones has a relatively new partnership with West-Tech, becoming their Hitachi dealer last year. Having quickly established a relationship with Russ Bennett, he appreciates West-Tech’s attention to detail and likes the way they run their operation.

“The first word that comes to mind when I think of West-Tech is ‘professionalism,’” Jones says. “They are extremely well organized and equipped to handle any problem that comes along. If they call, they already have all the information ready for me that I’ll need in order to help them.”

Looking forward

While West-Tech’s scope of work has increased exponentially over the years, Engebretsen is happy with where the company is today, and feels fortunate to have grown up in the industry. He says that it would be difficult to start a construction company today in California – with a heavy regulatory environment and strong competition from large contractors, there are many barriers to entry. That’s why he’s excited that his son has shown interest in joining the company, and he will be joining a firm with an excellent company culture.

“I have competent managers – dedicated professionals who care about what they do,” he says. “We also make a point to identify laborers who we can move up in the organization. Our culture is such that I can give a lot of autonomy. I trust people, and they make great decisions.” ■