



Below: Norbert van Noesel



# Sustainability drives Thetford

As the popularity of RV travel continues to rise, so does the need for responsible and sustainable practices, including using RV toilet chemicals

Words Terry Owen

**T**hetford recognises this trend and paves the way for more sustainable practises. We asked Thetford's marketing manager, Norbert van Noesel, to explain more.

**Aboutcamp BtoB – Recent research from The Netherlands and Germany shows that campers focus more on the environment and sustainability than non-campers. How do Thetford's sanitary products stand up to this challenge?**

**Norbert van Noesel –** Our cassette toilets and Porta Potti's provide the most home-like experience and are designed to last decades with the appropriate consumables. These ensure the toilets stay clean and hygienic while consistently delivering optimal performance.

We encourage sustainability over constant buying. If someone bought a second-hand RV and is considering upgrading the installed cassette toilet, Thetford Fresh-up Set makes it easy.

With the Fresh-up Set one can replace the waste-holding tank, seat, and cover without having to replace the entire toilet. From this year, we also have our Twusch ceramic insert that effectively renews the toilet bowl and prolongs the lifespan of the toilet.

**Aboutcamp BtoB – How do your toilet systems stand up to the environmental challenge?**

**Norbert van Noesel –** Our additives serve several purposes, including liquifying waste and preventing malodour formation, without compromising the organic breakdown processes in wastewater treatment systems. When used correctly they can safely be disposed in the general sewage system. We have a range of septic tank-safe products for use where needed. Even when effective sewage treatment is challenging, our products maintain environmental integrity without compromising functionality. These additives have a minimal impact

on the environment. Indeed, the small dosage is such that the impact is not more significant than all the chemicals we use at home. Camping practices have a lower environmental impact than our home activities. Using our toilet systems and additives means campers use only about 5% of the flush water they typically use at home.

**Aboutcamp BtoB – What initiatives are you taking to further minimise the environmental impact of your additives?**

**Norbert van Noesel –** We continuously develop our products to enhance performance and reduce environmental impact. Our lab experts constantly seek alternative ingredients to lower the environmental impact. Moreover, we look at the logistical needs of our products. For example, the concentrated line requires less packaging and minimises transportation needs. PowerPods Bio have a biological action to deal with waste, and our improved Bathroom Cleaner is formulat-



Thetford  
cassette toilet  
and additives



ed with biobased ingredients. What's more, we work hard to introduce recycled materials for our plastic bottles.

**Aboutcamp BtoB – Some observers might say that a dry diverting toilet is best for RVs because it uses no chemicals. What do you say to that?**

**Norbert van Noesel –** Even diverting toilets need consumables such as litter and plastic bags - and woe betide if the bags fail. This brings a challenge to compostable bags. There are also questions around disposal, convenience, cleaning and smell. Currently, there is no hygienic infrastructure set up for the disposal of toilet bags, leading to the necessity of disposing them in regular litter bins. Not an ideal situation. And regarding composting toilets; with the right conditions, human outputs will compost in no less than several months. This presents unique challenges to the industry.

**Aboutcamp BtoB – Some of your additives labels state that they harm aquatic life. That must mean they can have a negative environmental impact.**

**Norbert van Noesel –** As imposed by EU regulations, the label information relates to the liquid in undiluted form. In use, at the recommended high dilution levels (60 ml to 20 litres or 0.3%), the additives change in nature as they work. Diluted with all other sewage water, there is no problem for the regular water purification processes to do their work.

**Aboutcamp BtoB – Certain products claim to break down organic waste, based on microorganisms and enzymes. Are these not better for the environment?**

**Norbert van Noesel –** This claim is not realistic. Biological processes take time, and the number of microorganisms and enzymes in faeces and urine is such that the small amount added to the waste tank cannot do anything meaningful. This type of product is

relatively useless for a 20-litre tank with a maximum standing time of about three to five days; any observable effect is mainly due to the perfume and surfactants.

It is possible to outnumber the microorganisms and enzymes in human waste, but this would be simply too expensive for an additive – around 100 Euros for one bottle. Another issue is that biological products can produce a nasty by-product: ammonia. This is particularly true in hot weather, when the smell can be pretty strong.

**Aboutcamp BtoB – Several ‘green’ products are on the market, with incredible claims. What do you make of them?**

**Norbert van Noesel –** Claims such as ‘contains natural soaps and natural essential oils’ are exaggerated marketing. Soap is not a naturally occurring substance; it is, by definition, an oil or fat that has been treated, and therefore, an artificial substance not found in nature. In any case, soap would not do anything helpful in this application. Essential oils are, by definition, natural, being the substances extracted from

plants that define the “essence” of the fragrance of that plant. Some products claim to prevent and remove scale, but the ones we’ve looked at don’t have a pH low enough to do this. Also, claiming to be 100% chemical-free is a misleading message. The substances may be naturally occurring, but they’re still chemicals. And, it doesn’t follow that a naturally occurring substance can’t harm the environment. For example, seawater can kill plants and freshwater fish if it gets in the wrong place. User feedback on these products seems mixed, with many saying such additives last only a day or so before losing their effectiveness. This suggests the effect is more down to the fragrance than anything else. The short-term effect leads to using more of the product, not being environmentally friendly.

**Aboutcamp BtoB – Readers of the popular German camping magazine Promobil have once again voted Thetford number one as a supplier of toilet systems. You must be very pleased with that.**

**Norbert van Noesel –** The result suggests a high customer satisfaction with our products, but we realise that we should avoid getting comfortable with that knowledge. There is a need to constantly strive for excellence to uphold our ranking. We are still very proud to hold this first position.

## Thetford's commitment to the environment

*“Thetford's commitment to environmental responsibility is reflected in continuous innovation. Our highly skilled product developers experiment with lower ingredient doses and search for alternative ingredients that lower the overall environmental impact of our products whilst maintaining optimum product performance where it counts. This way, we can offer the best-performing products with an appropriate focus on sustainability and the environment. Our additives are responsibly packaged and expertly*

*developed, using only the most suitable ingredients for treating human waste. By following the instructions on our labels, users minimise the environmental impact to a negligible level. On top of that, our toilets are designed to last at least for the lifetime of the RV and then to be recycled. We have a huge group of end-users; Thetford Friends, we are connected to. In interaction with them, we aim to continue the development of our products to ensure they maintain their position of best in class”, concludes Norbert van Noesel.*