Storage Tank Cleaning Intervals 101

Tanks within a single distribution system will have different cleaning cycles. The first tank in a system, usually the Clear Water Storage (CWS) at a Water Treatment Plant may need 6 monthly to 12 monthly cleaning if there is a lot of post floc present or significant lime type material is being dosed in. If the CWS is kept clean, then the other tanks down the line will not be receiving the same amount of sediment loadings. Likewise, the last tank in the system may have minimal sediments, due to 'drop out' along the way.

On average, tanks supplied with good quality, treated water should be cleaned every 4 to 6 years. If sediment loadings are kept small (5 to 15mm) then disposal issues are minimised. The more sediment that is allowed to accumulate, then disinfection systems are working harder and cleaning is much slower (and expensive) and sediment disposal issues are compounded.

Some large, well run systems have cleaning frequencies of 10 years +, as there is minimal sediment coming through into the tanks. Inspections are still done however @ 4 yearly intervals to maintain awareness on structural, operational and water quality issues.

Unfiltered water (especially bore waters) with iron and/or manganese loadings should be cleaned between 2 and 4 years, but once again, after the first clean and based on the previous history, an accurate interval can be predicted to allow for good water quality and effective operational issues.

Tanks should also be cleaned so that they can be inspected thoroughly and not JUST to remove the sediments – the few hours onsite each time are often the only human contact a storage tank receives throughout its operational life. OH&S issues are currently preventing regular 'health checks' from occurring to tanks in many cases (local operators have been told NOT to climb up onto the roof area), so much of the significant evidence, such as roof damage, open hatches, vermin entry and vandalism remain unreported.