

# 'The silver bullet to garbage': WastAway becoming talk of trash world

By BILL POOVEY / Associated Press Writer

McMINNVILLE (AP) — Trucks dump tons of unsorted household garbage inside a cavernous room at WastAway, where a conveyor system grinds it, shreds it and heats it.

After about 30 minutes, the garbage has become "fluff," a safe and stink-free product that looks like wood pulp.

Fluff never goes to landfills, and it has so many uses that state and local officials — and even some WastAway competitors — are saying the company's innovative process could provide a real alternative to landfills.

The fluff can be used as a compost for growing plants, but it can also be used for more durable products, such as park benches, landscape timbers and fencing.

Tennessee's director of solid waste management, Mike Apple, said the state has done extensive sampling and testing of WastAway's product and hasn't found any problems.

"It has great potential," Apple said. "This is the first truly recycling project we have come up with."

Buford Powell, who manages the BFI Middle Point Landfill in Rutherford County, said he has lost the residential garbage business of two counties to WastAway.

The unique recycling system is a "magical mystery machine ... the silver bullet to garbage," Powell said.

"I may be way off-base, but I think it is good technology," he said. "I think it should coexist with the landfill. You could take a site that has got 20 years left on it and add that technology and turn it into a 50-year site."

WastAway's parent company, Bouldin Corp., began in 1959 making machinery for the greenhouse and nursery industry in McMinnville, a town 65 miles southeast of Nashville that calls itself the "Nursery Capital of the World."

Now WastAway's principal owner, Floyd Bouldin, spends much of his time showing off the fluff and the machinery that was primarily designed and built by Bouldin Corp. employees.

Since June, WastAway has been taking residential garbage from Warren County, where the company is located.

Bouldin said the process can recycle 95 percent of residential garbage. There is no garbage sorting required, and the conveyor separates any aluminum to be resold.

WastAway also operates a laboratory where fluff is constantly sampled for hazardous materials.

Warren County's sanitation director, Steve Hillis, said the change to WastAway has saved money. County trucks were making 106-mile round trips to the landfill, but WastAway is just across the road from his office. The change reduces wear and tear on the trucks and recycles 95 percent of the 8,700 tons of garbage that were being taken to the landfill



Floyd Bouldin, the principal owner of the WastAway company, shows off a pile of "fluff," a product made from unsorted household garbage, in the company's plant in McMinnville on Feb. 18, 2004. (AP Photo/Mark Humphrey)

annually.

Warren County is also getting a \$196,000 grant from the state for increasing its recycled garbage from about 18 percent to 95 percent. Some of that money will pay for a new frontloader truck.

"This is the first grant we ever got like that," Hillis said.

WastAway has demonstrated its equipment at military bases in Kentucky and Georgia. Company spokesman Bob Brown said there is also interest outside the United States.

"We are working with a country on a deal where they are going to buy the equipment and lease it back to us and then operate it under our supervision," Brown said.

The equipment and startup of the conveyor operation represents a total investment of \$4 million to \$12 million, Brown said, depending partly on the location. The company can build and operate conveyor systems in any county that wants them.

Another Bouldin division, Composite Products of America, will manufacture and sell the more durable products made from fluff.

"This is the way of the future," said Dean Clark, supervisor of solid waste and recycling at the U.S. Army's Fort Drum in northern New York.

Clark visited WastAway last month and said if he had his way "we'd have it up there tomorrow." He said discussions were continuing.

Instead of the base using a county landfill, WastAway "would run and manage it and I would bring my garbage to them and dump it and say 'Thank you,'" Clark said. "I wish they would sell me the machine but they won't."

Hillis predicted other landfill customers would change to WastAway when they see it.

"Its like anything else new," Hillis said. "When a new car was built everybody laughed at it until they found out it was a good thing."

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On the Net:

WastAway Services: <http://www.wastaway.com>

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