

SALVAGING FOR SECOND CHANCES

Revving Up Recycling's 'Economic Engine'

By Symone C. Skrzycki

There's no time to waste.

Recycle. Reuse. Reduce. Renew.

Now.

Recycling isn't reserved for the environmentally conscious. It also impacts the economy.

According to a study commissioned by the Indiana Recycling Coalition (IRC), over 92% of what gets thrown away in Indiana is valuable recyclable and compostable material.

The same report – *The Untapped Job Potential of Indiana's Recycling Industry*, conducted by the Bowen Center for Public Affairs at Ball State University – reveals that a 25% increase in recycling could create 10,000 new jobs.

In addition, approximately 66% of what's landfilled or incinerated is not just garbage, but a commodity that manufacturers refer to as "recycled content feedstock." Examples include paper, plastic and metals.

First-term Indiana Rep. Carey Hamilton (D-Indianapolis), who serves as the IRC's executive director, says education is essential.

"What we continue to work on is making sure that communities know there's a lot of in-state demand for recycled commodities," she emphasizes. "In Indiana, we still have a relatively low recycling rate. If we can increase our recycling in Indiana, we will directly support these manufacturers. We'll create new jobs all around the state to get that material ready to send to them."

High-tech paper mills, refineries and more are poised to revitalize Indiana's recycling industry. All are powered by innovation.

Breaking ground, bringing jobs

Georgia-based Pratt Industries has a culture that's "steeped in sustainability," says Midwest region vice president and general manager Paul England.

He adds that it has a dominant play in the Indiana marketplace, with a 100% recycled paper mill (one of four it operates

nationwide) and corrugated packaging plant in Valparaiso and a recycling facility in Gary.

In 2016, Pratt opened the \$270 million Valparaiso paper mill.

"What we do is, me and my team go out and secure 500,000 tons a year," England explains. "We give it to our paper mill in Valparaiso and they make paper. That paper goes in a tunnel across maybe 20 yards to the largest corrugated box plant in the world. They make boxes. They ship those boxes to



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Carey Hamilton

companies like Amazon, FedEx and Home Depot and Kroger, and on and on.

"The very cool thing is that they deliver those boxes. My team picks up all of their recycling and brings it back, and we do it all over again. It's called closing the loop. And a large portion of the fiber we consume at our paper mill is from our customers," he continues. "When I talk to customers about closing the loop and bringing back their

recyclables, it resonates with them like you would not believe! It's a big part of what we do. It's a big value proposition. And it's great for our customers."

All about the bottles

Perpetual Recycling Solutions, located in Richmond, creates clean PET (polyethylene terephthalate) flakes from the plastic beverage bottles and food containers discarded by consumers.

Launched in 2012, it employs 73 at its 125,000-square-foot facility.

"We recycle about 120 million pounds of material a year and I expect that to go up in the future – not down," observes chief executive officer Peter Zurkow. "If I loosely work into that (it equals around) three billion bottles.

"If you draw a line from eastern Michigan to us and then to Huntsville, Alabama, that makes us sort of the western outpost. There's not another facility doing what we're doing until California."

Perpetual's largest customers are thermoformer sheet manufacturers.

"People that make the clear clam shells that you buy your sandwich in at the supermarket or you buy a fruit platter from the grocery store," he discloses. "Those are our biggest customers. For us, the goal is food-grade applications. That's what we're set up to do. We're set up to create a level of decontamination that makes the product reusable in the food-grade world."

Pumped about plastic

Stephen Hogan, president and CEO of GEP Fuel & Energy Indiana, is passionate when describing the company's \$300 million recycling project in Indiana.

There are two components: a recycling center and an adjacent plastics-to-diesel refinery near Camden. The undertaking will create up to 256 high-wage jobs in Carroll County by 2020.

"We want to have a good, stable workforce that can be with us long term because we don't want to constantly go through the cost of retraining," Hogan

confides. “We felt that Carroll County was ideal for that situation. . . . Frankly, that kind of rural environment – the skillsets – a lot of these people are farm kids or worked on the farms. That translates really well into the skillsets we need to operate our facilities.

“We may have to bring in a few specialized people, but our hope is to hire – other than those specialized people – virtually our entire workforce hopefully out of Carroll County and some of the surrounding counties.”

The recycling center will handle 40 rail cars (primarily carrying auto shredder residue) daily. That translates to one million-plus tons a year diverted from landfills.

There will be almost no residual leftover at the refinery: Approximately 75% of the fuel produced will be diesel and 25% will be gasoline.

“We also get propane,” Hogan remarks, “which we in turn can use on our site to run the site, including generating electricity if we get power generation sets in there. This whole thing will be very self-sufficient.”

Mulch and mobility

In January, eight Hoosier recyclers received grant funding from the Indiana Department of Environmental Management’s (IDEM) Recycling Market Development Program to expand recycling in Indiana.

Among them were Monroeville Box, Pallet & Wood Products (MBPWP); Rumpke Waste & Recycling; and East-Terra Plastics.

MBPWP, which has 28 Allen County employees and was founded in 1953, applied grant money toward purchasing a large grinder that will turn scrap into animal bedding or mulch.

“It added several jobs: a delivery driver for the mulch and three men operating the machine,” affirms president Donald Witte. He hopes to create two or three additional



The Indiana Recycling Coalition’s 2017 annual conference brought together recyclers from across the state.

positions over the next year.

“We’re very environmentally aware and always have tried to recycle as much as we possibly could. This just brings us to absolutely zero waste,” he emphasizes.

Rumpke was awarded funding to construct a new recycling center at its Medora location, which is a regional operation. Rumpke is one of the nation’s largest privately owned residential and commercial waste and recycling firms.

“Rumpke is excited to enhance recycling opportunities throughout Indiana with this new facility,” regional vice president Bill Rumpke III comments in a press release. “Items that once went into the landfill will now be recovered and manufactured into new products.”

The project will include construction of a 5,540-square-foot concrete pad with an enclosure to protect a recycling baler and collected recycling material. The Medora facility could be operational by the end of summer or early fall 2017.

East-Terra Plastics in Indianapolis kicked

off a statewide agricultural plastics recycling program that takes some of the legwork out of farmers’ efforts to properly discard containers.

“Indiana is ranked No. 7 as far as agricultural production each year, but we’re ranked No. 34 out of 50 for agricultural plastics recycling,” laments business manager Lawrence Bowlin. “Just based on our ranking in agricultural production, that kind of gives you an idea of the volume of agricultural plastics these farmers use and (they) have no real resource to dispose of it without it cutting into their income.”

East-Terra, which has 10 employees, is providing an alternative.

“It’s not as convenient for them (farmers) to bring all of the plastic to (East-Terra’s facility in) Indianapolis,” imparts owner and president Jay Chu. “We do it the other way where we bring all of the equipment (to them) on-site. We call it a free service for the farmer community.”

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Bottles travel through a sorting line at Perpetual Recycling Solutions. An East-Terra Plastics team member inspects material before it’s loaded into a grinder.



Recycling

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Bowlin chimes in with a chuckle: “I really want to stress that it’s a free service. Believe me, I’ve had to tell the farmers multiple times, ‘It’s free! We’re not going to charge you.’ ”

The day *BizVoice*[®] spoke with Bowlin and Chu, interviews were underway to start hiring and training the crew to perform the collections in all 92 counties in Indiana.

“All of that plastic we collect, we’ll track what county it came from. We’ll track poundage. And it will be brought back to our facility where we will re-wash and re-clean it,” Bowlin declares. “We already have an industrial end use for it. We already have another line of business for that ground-up and granulated plastic for another user.”

With the agricultural plastics recycling program, “it’s about educating not just the farming community, but people in solid waste management districts that we’re here, letting them know our presence to try to maximize participation. I think 2017 is going to be a huge year for Indiana recycling!”

RESOURCES: Carey Hamilton, Indiana Recycling Coalition, at www.indianarecycling.org | Paul England, Pratt Industries, at www.prattindustries.com | Peter Zurkow, Perpetual Recycling Solutions, at www.perpetualrpet.com | Stephen Hogan at GEP Fuel & Energy Indiana | Jay Chu and Lawrence Bowlin, East-Terra Plastics, at www.east-terra.com | Rumpke Waste & Recycling at www.rumpke.com