

HIGH DRAMA ON THE RECYCLING EDGE

THROUGH waste diversion and alternative markets, residuals that were once landfilled are generating higher profits for businesses through reuse in-house, increases sales revenues and cost savings from tip fee reductions. As companies come to recognize the advantages of responsible recycling, they also realize the need for technical assistance via materials exchange programs. Materials exchanges, which began in the early 1990s, exist in many forms — nonprofit as well as for-profit. Some provide one-on-one customer assistance like the Iowa Waste Exchange. Others like the Minnesota Materials Exchange are more self-serve oriented, with an online interactive database.

The Iowa Waste Exchange (IWE) boasts one of the country's premier programs, starting out originally as the By-Product and Waste Search Service in 1990. Success of the pilot program led to funding from tonnage fees paid to the state by waste generators. Since its inception, IWE has diverted over 800,000 tons of materials from landfills, saving Iowa firms over \$20 million in disposal fees. The range of industrial by-products no longer are limited to fibers, sludges, paper, plastics, metals and biomass.

Not easy to find, but there are companies who eagerly seek a half-million tons of wood scrap or 26,000 pounds of outdated noodles.

Shelly Codner



An excellent example of how waste exchanges divert materials is offered by Larry Doose of the Sylvan Corporation, whose company makes direct contact with wood scrap generators and pallet recyclers.

For example in February 2000, an eastern Iowa warehouse facility discovered it had collected over 26,000 pounds of outdated noodles. In an effort to assist the owner in managing the products, the warehousing company contacted IWE Representative Julie Plummer based out of Eastern Iowa Community College District in Davenport. Julie then contacted Ken McKay, President of Livestock Services, Inc., who was able to utilize the noodles as a corn replacement carbohydrate source in cattle feed. This transaction saved the cattle producer approximately \$50.00 per ton and saved the warehousing company approximately \$600.00 in tipping fees.

In addition to this hands-on assistance, IWE provides a searchable online database for use by businesses. Data is controlled through internal entry by area resource specialists. Other waste exchange programs allow businesses to post their own materials on an interactive database as is the case with the Minnesota Materials Exchange (MME).

The MME program is coordinated by the Minnesota Technical Assistance Program (MnTAP), which gets funded through a grant from the Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance to the University's School of Public Health. The program is made up of an alliance of nine entities existing in various regions throughout the state. In the last five years, the MME has helped businesses save about \$3 million and exchange over eight million pounds of material.

One such exchange made through the MME has allowed 500,000 pounds of wood scrap per year to be reused instead of incinerated. Located in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, Productive Alternatives is a rehabilitation center for persons with disabilities, which (among other programs), makes furniture. Steve Lorshbough, production manager, learned about MME as he was researching alternatives for the wood scrap that was currently being incinerated.

Through the program, Lorshbough contacted Larry Doose, president of Sylva Corporation. "Larry did an on-site visit to be sure the materials were what he could use," said Lorshbough. "He takes all of the wood now. We've reduced our waste stream so there's been significant savings." Sylva has some customers in the Dakotas, explains Doose. "When the truck comes back empty from delivering product up there, we arrange to pick up the scrap material from Productive Alternatives." Because Sylva had been back hauling and Fergus Falls is on route, this is a cost-effective partnership. "I scan the listings on the MME online database myself. We've made contacts with pallet recycling companies in the Twin Cities and get quite a lot of material from them as well," concludes Doose.

If your business is in need of the type of technical assistance being provided by waste materials exchange programs, you can view a comprehensive national listing of programs in your region by visiting the Environmental Protection Agency website at <http://www.epa.gov/jtr/comm/exchange.htm>. ■