

Waste Not, Want Not



Crane operator Tom Johnson hoists household garbage to be burned and converted to energy in the Pittsfield Resource Recovery Facility on Thursday.

Photos by Ben Garver/Berkshire Eagle Staff



The combustion chambers of the Pittsfield Resource Recovery Facility can burn up to 240 tons of waste a day.

From Trash to Treasure

eco/Pittsfield turns garbage into energy

By Scott Stafford, Berkshire Eagle Staff

PITTSFIELD — After 25 years, all of Pittsfield's trash is still going to a good cause.

eco/Pittsfield is celebrating its 25th year of burning trash to generate steam that powers much of Crane & Co.'s paper-making operations.

Since 1981, the operation formerly known as Vicon has been saving millions of cubic yards of landfill space, conserving fossil fuels that otherwise would have been used to power Crane's operations and transport the tons of trash to a landfill, and saving local cities money in the cost of transporting trash to more distant destinations.

It also provides 32 full- and two part-time jobs to local workers.

"I'd say it's a win-win-win all around," said Bruce Collingwood, Pittsfield's Commissioner of Public Works. "They're a very integral part of the city's trash system, that's for sure."

Located on Hubbard Avenue, eco/Pittsfield is owned by Energy Answers Corporation. (EAC).

According to Margretta E. Morris, EAC Vice President, eco/Pittsfield burns about 85 percent of the combustible trash produced in Berkshire County, from both Pittsfield and North Adams, as well as from many other towns through independent trash hauling services.

By burning the trash, the furnace creates steam that, in turn, is used in four Crane paper mills along the Housatonic and that generates electricity for the plant

Continues on Reverse

eco/Pittsfield turns trash into electricity

Kevin Rousseau, Facilities Engineering Manager at eco/Pittsfield, noted that about 80,000 tons of trash are burned every year at about 1,800 degrees, or 240 tons for every day of full operation.

That is a lot of trash that doesn't need to be buried in a landfill somewhere.

Figures provided by Morris show that, in 25 years, the 1.8 million tons of waste burned at eco/Pittsfield would have used up 3 million cubic yards of landfill space. And the total quantity of steam sold to Crane over that period has saved more than 78 million gallons of oil.

During the winter, Crane uses between 60 and 80 percent of the steam in its paper-making process and to heat its facilities. In the summer, it uses about 50 percent of the steam.

Rousseau said that the burning process is closely monitored and that almost all pollutants created in the burning process are eliminated. "One-third of the equipment here is actually pollution-control equipment."

All that is left after the process is water vapor.

Besides the trash-burning operation, eco/Pittsfield is a drop-off point for recyclables, yard and construction waste, old appliances and batteries.

Morris said there are seven such [WTE] facilities in Massachusetts and a total of 89 spread through 27 states in the United States. These plants generate the energy equivalent of 2,700 megawatts of power and manage 29 million tons of waste annually, serving 36 million people with 1.98 million homes using energy produced from waste.

And, since the cost of fuel began rising last summer, there has been an increasing interest in building more, she noted.

Crane & Co. Vice President Stephen Sears said that, as power costs started spiking, company officials were gratified to know that they could count on the stable cost and dependable supply of the steam coming from eco/Pittsfield.

"I think it's a good thing for the community as well," Sears said. "I don't think we should export our refuse, and I don't think we should let it be imported either. So it's a good use of our resources."

At a glance:

eco/Pittsfield at 500 Hubbard Ave.

- > Started operations in 1981
- > 240 tons of trash is burned daily
- > 80,000 tons of trash is burned annually
- > 1.8 million tons of trash has been burned since 1981
- > 3 million cubic yards of landfill space has been conserved since 1981
- > More than 78 million gallons of oil has been saved since 1981

Reprinted with permission of the Berkshire Eagle