Renewable Energy May Be Hot, but Waste Managers Are My Heroes

If you're not involved in the trash or recycling industry, chances are good that innovations in collecting and processing our garbage are off your radar. When characters get nosy about Tony Soprano's line of business, "waste management" is the wise-guy throwaway punchline. But today's advanced trash operations are far from the old dump and cover or incineration solutions. Many disposal operations are building bridges to a zero waste future.

Image courtesy of Diversified Recycling

Our company contracts with parks and dog daycares in Metro Denver to compost dog waste, so I subscribe to Waste360. This online media and events network provides information to solid waste, recycling, organics, and sustainable communities via daily emails with the latest industry buzz.

Sometimes my mind wanders into climate change doldrums. Will the big-time doers follow through on their promises to slow down global warming? Do eco-conscious consumers have the will to shift behavior and demand meaningful policies? And by the way, my tiny household recycling space is a frozen tundra. Will taking our food scraps out to the curb with the trash be one more downer?

On days like these, the Waste 360 newsfeed can be as bracing as a fresh breeze. Amid the nuts and bolts posts about lawsuits, mergers, and acquisitions, you'll see occasional updates on environmental advances. And, no lie! There are so many industry pros out there making real progress that I wonder why only local and business news outlets cover the stories. Here are the latest bytes:

- A Louisiana solid waste district's facility fuels trash trucks with biogas emitted from its landfill, and it shares compressed biogas with vehicles at an additional remote station.
- The New York City Department of Sanitation is expanding its e-cycleNYC to provide residential pick-up services to more than 500,000 households.
- New York's Lewis County will be hauling its mixed recyclables miles away to a recycling center with sorting capability to offer its customers the convenience of single-stream collections.

These are just a few examples of how progressive waste managers all over the country are going beyond business-as-usual to foster sustainability. Whether they work for private companies or public authorities, they take their environmental stewardship seriously. These professionals are aware that a landfill is a no-win answer. They're trying to divert as many recyclables from their plastic-lined tombs as possible. They're trying to incorporate waste-to-energy programs into their operations. Like most of us, their options are limited. But many of them are working hard to expand our disposal options.

The for-profit waste managers need to make business cases for each step toward near zero waste. County and municipal operators have to justify the expense of environmental projects to taxpayers. Many waste companies and jurisdictions proactively pursue government grants and creative arrangements with outside recycling innovators to reach their goals.

Given their limitations, waste managers are tireless unsung heroes on the front lines of sustainability. The industry suffers from a long history of low status, drudgery and invisibility. Facilities grab attention only when they produce nuisance odors. We want the trash we produce to be "out of sight, out of mind, out of range." But doesn't waste management's humble efforts to save the planet deserve as much

recognition and resources as its sexier renewable energy cousins?

Back in the day, Dad always gave our dedicated trash hauler a bottle of good Scotch for Christmas. What can we do today to show our waste management eco partners that we appreciate what they are doing?

Recommended Reading:

- *Detox Cheap and Easy Without Fasting – Recipes Included*
- *Total Nutrition – Make your own Homemade Multivitamin and Mineral Formula*
- *Seven Easy Ways to Make Your Home More Energy Efficient*

Sources:

- *Louisiana Parish Expands CNG Station in Circular Waste-to-Energy Pact with Progressive Waste* – Waste 360
- *New York's e-cycleNYC program goes citywide* – Recycling Today
- *New York County Plans Move to Zero-Sort Recycling through Utica Agency* – Journal and Republican