



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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State Recycling Business Employment Numbers Increase

RALEIGH – Recycling businesses in North Carolina have made significant advances in the levels of capital investment and employment over previous years, according to figures released Nov. 1 by the North Carolina Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance (DPPEA).

In a sample survey of 437 North Carolina businesses listed in the state's Directory of Markets for Recyclable Materials, 324 of those businesses responded as having employees dedicated totally or in part to recycling services. Overall, the respondents listed a total of 27,925 employees, with 8,721 of those workers (32 percent of the sampled workforce) performing recycling-related activity. By comparison with a similar survey conducted in 1995, private recycling industry employment has grown by 12 percent in five years.

In the public sector, the level of recycling employment remained relatively the same, with approximately 1,110 employees. Of the state's 620 local governments, 58 percent have recycling programs in place. Together with the number of private sector recycling positions, the tally stands at 12,738. Comparatively speaking, the number of recycling-related jobs in North Carolina is approximately the same as that of the agriculture/crop industry, and slightly higher than that of the state's livestock industry.

Businesses have added to their recycling arsenal with the purchase of balers, shredders, extruders and other recycling process equipment to produce more saleable commodities. North Carolina offers certain property tax credits to businesses that purchase recycling equipment and/or designate areas in their facilities to recycling services. In addition, DPPEA's Recycling Business Assistance Center (RBAC) has a partnership with the N.C. Department of Commerce, the Community Center for Self-Help, the Small Business and Technology Development Center and the Sustainable Jobs Fund to assist in expansion and development of recycling-based businesses.

Perhaps most encouraging are the number and kinds of new businesses developing to help reduce North Carolina's solid waste burden. These companies are turning previously-disposed wastes into new products or helping to get the materials to manufacturers of recycled products. The level of entrepreneurial activity in recycling is high, with companies emerging to handle many different kinds of previously-disposed materials and products. For instance, new trends in electronics, food, construction waste and carpet recycling are developing with the creation of new businesses designed to recover the increasing glut of wastes going to the landfill.

As waste handling costs have risen, many businesses and industries have found it cost effective to create positions dedicated to monitoring and preventing waste in-house. The hiring of such personnel has had the effect of significantly reducing waste handling and landfill fee overhead to the businesses. The major objective of the move to develop in-house waste reduction and recycling programs is to protect the environment, preserve natural resources and to conserve landfill space; however, increased profit margins and new job creation are welcome benefits. In some cases, businesses that develop a recycling and recovery program may have a competitive advantage by offering services that their competitors do not.

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REPORTERS AND EDITORS: *Examples of these types of recycling businesses can be found on the attached page. For further information on recycling in North Carolina, contact Diana Kees, DPPEA public information officer, at (919) 715-6515/6500 or Diana.kees@ncmail.net or visit the DPPEA Web site at www.p2pays.org.*

NC-Based Recycling Businesses

R-24 Lumber Company in **Charlotte** has developed into a key player in North Carolina's wood waste recycling infrastructure. The company, created by entrepreneur Bill Juhas, recovers random lengths of scrap lumber and remanufactures them into eight and nine-foot wall studs through a process called "finger jointing." The resulting wall studs are straighter, stronger and sell slightly below the price of conventional wooden 2X4 wall studs. The company expects to divert 12,000 tons of discarded lumber annually.

Although **Brooks Contractor** in **Chatham County** has been a leader in the composting industry since 1992, the company has recently carved out a unique niche in the recycling industry, according to Craig Coker, the state's organics waste specialist. Within the last year, Brooks has developed a program to collect and process source-separated food waste (food waste separated from the remainder of the waste stream) from restaurants, microbreweries, markets, cafeterias and grocery stores. The company is expanding operations and expects to divert more than 3,500 tons of food waste by the end of the year.

Blue Ridge Recycling is a new company with locations in both **Charlotte** and **Morrisville**. The company, created by longtime recycling entrepreneur Robert Gleaves, collects post-consumer Nylon-6 carpet from industrial sources, bales it and ships it to an end market where it is processed into caprolactam, the raw material from which Nylon-6 carpet is made. The caprolactam is then made back into Nylon-6 for new carpets and for injection-molded Nylon parts. Blue Ridge also collects carpet padding that is shipped to manufacturers to be made into re-bond carpet padding. The company has created 11 new positions in both the Charlotte and Morrisville facilities. According to national figures, carpet comprises approximately 2 percent of the waste disposed of in a sanitary landfill in the United States. Blue Ridge Recycling is expanding both the recycling infrastructure by creating new jobs and developing a market for a previously discarded commodity.

Southern Resources in **Charlotte** has been in the metals recycling business for some time, but the company is breaking ground with a new facet of the business – electronics recycling. The diversion and recovery of electronics looms on the horizon as a new necessity in the business of waste diversion. As excess obsolete electronics and computers steadily increase, new cutting-edge technologies and new jobs are being developed by Southern Resources and businesses like it to recapture both electronics components and materials.

Another company, **P&R Environmental Industries** (PREI), had its beginnings in **Youngsville**. Company President Gary Pratt began working out of a small office within the Franklin County Economic Development Commission Building in the summer of 1993 armed with a business plan and a building site. By December 1993 PREI was housed in a 38,400 square-foot facility, employed 50 people and processed about 1.6 million pounds of commingled plastic bottles monthly. Today, PREI has become the East Coast's premier plastics processor, employing more than 170 people and processing seven million pounds of commingled plastic a month.

Some businesses that reported hiring employees to fill recycling positions were not recycling businesses per-se, but were those that had taken an interest in environmental stewardship. For instance, **Artist Colony**, a company in **Lexington**, is a manufacturer of "beanbag" chairs. Although the company is in the chair making business, it uses recycled discarded plastic foam as filler. Artist Colony uses a number of employees to grind the plastic, which otherwise would have been buried in a landfill. Not only does the company realize a financial advantage by using recycled materials instead of virgin feedstock, it has created additional jobs.