



TUNED IN TO THE LA OPPORTUNITY

UNIVERSAL WASTE SYSTEMS IS EMBRACING THE GOAL OF NEAR ZERO WASTE IN LA COUNTY

While some California companies and individuals are griping about the ever-aggressive requirements for reduced landfill waste and increased recycling, one company is embracing the legislation with outstretched arms.

“In 1989, California passed legislation requiring the recycling of certain materials,” explains Mark Blackburn, President, Universal Waste Systems. “And for the past 25 years, there have been a series of planned increases in the percent of waste mandated for recycling. Currently, it is 41 percent. By 2017, it is set for 71 percent. By 2025, the City of Los Angeles wants to be at 91 percent recycled.”

That’s everything found in the trash bin from paper trash, glass, wire, and plastic to food waste. And, if the recyclable material can be “upcycled,” all the better. Upcycling is the new buzzword for making new products out of what used to be waste.

“My dad was in the trash business all the time I was growing up, and I ultimately went to work with him. As he planned his retirement, I started Universal Waste Systems — my version of his waste business. And since 1990, I’ve been working on growing in Southern California by offering more and more different types of waste and recycling services to help companies and individuals comply with all requirements.”

THREE COMPANIES IN ONE

Over the past couple of decades, Blackburn, and ultimately his sons, have branched from curbside and commercial waste pickup and hauling to providing recyclable sorting and sales. Recently, this part of the business achieved the milestone of processing 250,000 tons of solid waste a year.

A second company was developed to pick up and process liquid waste through the construction, clean-out and hauling of septic tank waste, and the rental and cleaning of portable toilets throughout Los Angeles County. It has achieved a volume of 2.5 million gallons a year.

The newest company is Greenwise Soil Technologies. It provides the composting of large volumes of organic material such as clean wood and green waste. The end product is nitrolized fir shavings, compost, mulch, and other premium soil amendments for nurseries, landscapers, and garden centers.

“And what we’re starting to make with our compost is just the beginning!” exclaims Blackburn. “We plan to really build on our composting efforts as we work to blend our liquid waste business, green waste, and our upcoming food waste pick-up and processing.”

These innovations will not only provide their customers ways to easily meet increased recycling mandates, they will set the stage for some additional amazing

ideas. Utilizing just an aerobic digester and gas cleaning equipment, Universal Waste Systems intends to:

1. Produce enough methane gas to power an electric-generation turbine to meet their processing needs and to even power their trucks.
2. Produce ever more different types of compost to be used as soil amendments and ultimately, an even greater variety of products.

A NEW SET OF EQUIPMENT NEEDS

With decades of waste hauling under their belt, the Blackburn family is pretty sophisticated about their hauling and also their liquid waste equipment requirements.

But, as they branch into their composting and dehydration efforts, they have had to search for new equipment suppliers and partners.

“A significant part of operating a composting site is to have efficient wheel loaders to help unload, sort, and charge the material,” explains Blackburn. “And after the material has been ground, it must be moved into windrows for drying. Then, of course, there’s bulk loading.”

The company went through competitive interviews with the local loader dealers and chose to buy two Kawasaki 85Z7 wheel loaders. One has been outfitted with the TINK hydraulically raising, large bulk bucket, which they use for loading high-wall bulk semi-trailers — all sold by Bejac Corporation.

“We’re impressed with the Kawasaki loader design and the history of Kawasaki loaders

Universal Waste Systems is now recycling construction materials with their Kawasaki loaders.



serviced by Bejac in Southern California,” says Blackburn. “We really love them. And now that we’ve started buying them, I don’t want to shop around. We’ve established a great relationship with Bejac and we want to build on that. Right now, our loaders are tied to our green waste business. But we need new transfer stations, and I want to use them there as well — just a smaller model than the 85s we first bought.

“We’ve been very deliberate in our selection of new equipment. We’ve demoed multiple brands so we can really learn what we think works best for us. And, I’m not talking about just loaders, but multiple types of equipment. We’re doing rentals as well with the equipment we think we’d like to buy. What we ultimately choose, we want to stick with.”

Mitch Blackburn, along with his brother,

Mike, are at the forefront of the company’s Greenwise operation and are actually running the new Kawasaki 85Z7 loaders. “We love the loaders. You can do so many jobs with them,” enthuses Mitch. “We’re cleaning out trucks, charging the grinder and shredder, making windrows, and loading trucks with mulch. The loaders work great, and with all the dust that we create, the cab air conditioning and filtration systems are fantastic.”

The brothers are also quite enthusiastic about the TINK high bulk, hydraulically raise/tilt bucket. “We love that bucket because it makes it so much easier to load high wall trailers without a ramp, and it’s fast! We can load a trailer in 10 minutes, 15 tops!”

Universal Waste Systems is served by Bejac Corporation, Placentia, California.



Future Vision

“I’ve lived my life in Southern California and I’m excited about how the black cloud of pollution has almost been removed,” says Mark Blackburn. “It has taken a lot of work and there’s been substantial expense, but I think LA County is showing the way for a cleaner earth.”

Blackburn’s waste hauling and recycling company is pioneering ways to help both residents and companies comply with ever-tightening clean-earth mandates and at the same time, working to implement new programs of their own.

“We’ve already started upgrading our fleet of trucks to run on compressed natural gas which is cleaner, and we’re excited about moving to running on methane that we generate from our own organic waste recycling.

“We’re also moving toward using solar to power our offices, and rain retention tanks to power our truck washing efforts.

“And we’re not only doing this because we believe in the recycling business, but because I think, especially in Southern California where diesel fuel costs are high, electricity is high, and water is scarce, that we will economically come out ahead. It is definitely more fun to be part of the future than gripe about change.”

