

Peoria Disposal Company: Transitioning from Waste Disposal to Waste Materials Management



From hauling to recycling and landfill management, Peoria Disposal Company continues to look for innovative processes and niche markets in order to grow their presence in the waste and recycling industry.

Opening its doors in 1928, Peoria Disposal Company (PDC) has grown from a small one-man operation to a major player in the greater central Illinois waste and recycling industry. In order to make a living for his family during the depression, current President and CEO, Royal Coulter, says, “My grandfather went to the alleys of West Peoria and asked people if he could pick up their trash. From there, he began taking barrels and putting the trash in garbage cans, again raising the bar in the

1940s by using a pickup truck to haul the trash. In the 1970s and 1980s, PDC stayed on the front end of the waste industry's drive to enhance services with increased automation and other process enhancements, such as routing optimization programs.”

For 85 years, this family-owned company has emphasized how important it is to keep up with the changing industry, looking for new opportunities and branching into similar areas in order to become more successful and diverse. Royal stresses, “I think that anytime you can keep ownership in a family business strong and alive as well as taking it to the fourth generation is an accomplishment. All three of my sons, Chris, Matt and Jeff are vice presidents in the company and have taken active roles. In addition, we take pride in a low employee turnover for a company our size—a lot of our senior managers have been with us for more than 20 years.”

In 1989 Royal expanded outside of the Peoria area marketplace with the creation of Area Disposal Services, Inc (Area). PDC/Area presently employs approximately 550 employees, uses a fleet of 300+ trucks and 50 pieces of Caterpillar landfill equipment.

The company currently provides waste collection services in central Illinois and a half dozen counties in MO and IA. PDC/Area also has a market presence in 13 States, providing hazardous waste and specialized environmental laboratory services.

More Than Just a Waste Disposal Company

In addition to PDC's hauling business, they also operate four landfills in the region. The first landfill the company started was in 1968. Called the Peoria Disposal #1 Landfill (PDC #1), it started as a sanitary landfill when it received a permit to operate from the Peoria County Health Department. In 1979, the landfill was converted into a hazardous waste landfill—the first of its kind in the Great Lakes Region. In 1982, PDC won the operating contract for the Peoria City/County Landfill No. 1

Facility, which was a landfill owned jointly by the City and County of Peoria. PDC operated that facility until it reached the end of its disposal capacity in 1998. PDC also acquired the Clinton Landfill in 1989, which still operates today and went through a major expansion in 2002 to add 50 more years of projected service life. In 2004, PDC opened the Indian Creek Landfill in Tazewell County, which was expanded in 2007. In 1992, PDC acquired the Hickory Ridge Landfill, which is scheduled for an expansion in the near future. Finally, in 2009, PDC won a contract to run the new Peoria City/County Landfill No. 3 Facility (i.e., PCCL No. 3), which is projected to have a 40-year service life. This brand new site will be up and running by the time City and County of Peoria's current operating landfill is closed in 2020. PCCL No. 3 will include a Citizen's Convenience Center whereby Peoria County residents can drop off household hazardous waste free of charge. This permanent collection site that is located at a municipal solid waste landfill will be the first of its kind in the state of Illinois.

PDC Landfill No. 1 is more than just an industrial hazardous waste landfill. It also features a hazardous waste treatment center and a nonhazardous wastewater treatment plant. The hazardous waste treatment facility specializes in the treatment of the largest hazardous waste stream generated in the U.S. today, which is electric arc furnace (EAF) dust generated by steel mills. The waste material from these steel mills is shipped to the PDC Waste Stabilization Facility which uses a proprietary process to treat the EAF dust and renders it non-hazardous. Once the treated EAF waste is tested and deemed nonhazardous, it is shipped to PDC's Indian Creek Landfill for disposal.

The second largest waste stream that PDC handles at its Waste Stabilization Facility comes from electronic waste processors like Kuusakoski Recycling—the largest metals recycling firm in northern Europe and the second largest electronics waste recycling firm in the world. “Right now, about one half of the electronic waste stream is the Cathode Ray Tubes (CRTs) from old TVs and computer monitors, and this source of electronic waste will continue to grow. Approximately half of the states in the U.S. have posted e-waste bans from landfills. As more states adopt this prohibition, coupled with the fact that people are not buying old computer monitors or TVs anymore, the stockpiling of

CRTs will continue to occur unless viable, cost-effective and environmental friendly options exist to manage this challenging waste stream. Due to PDC's experience in dealing with the CRT waste stream, Kuusakoski approached us about managing their CRT glass. As the relationship evolved, Kuusakoski decided to build a CRT glass recycling processing center here in Peoria," says Chris Coulter.

This CRT facility became fully operational in early November 2013 and accepts whole TV sets and computer monitors. At the facility, e-waste is dismantled and the glass tubes will go through the processing line where they will be crushed and the steel band around the tube will be separated from the glass. The glass will also go through further processing whereby the leaded glass will be separated from the non-leaded glass. The leaded glass will go to the PDC Waste Stabilization Facility for treatment whereby PDC will render it non-hazardous and ship it to the Indian Creek Landfill where the treated CRT material will be used as alternate daily cover. Meanwhile, the non-leaded glass will be recycled and made into other products, or will be used as alternate daily cover at the Indian Creek Landfill. "This is going to be the most cost-effective option available to handle the CRT glass waste stream in the U.S. and we have the capacity to take care of it through our unique partnership with Kuusakoski Recycling," says Chris.

Part of PDC's landfill success has been their use of Caterpillar equipment throughout their landfill operations. This includes four 836H compactors, 13 D6 and D8 track dozers, three scrapers, three water trucks, eight excavators, seven backhoes, three generator sets, one skid steerer, one tele-handler and one forklift. Says Royal, "We've always been a Caterpillar user on the heavy equipment side and now we have eight of their trucks that service our hauling customers on a regular basis, picking up industrial waste and trash. We have also started looking at their packer truck products."

According to Royal, PDC has been able to turn out their equipment every three to four years. They have bought rail gondola car boxes from Progress Rail Services, which is a division of Caterpillar, which they use to ship non-hazardous waste to their Clinton Landfill. “We have a great partnership with Caterpillar. They stand behind their product and anytime we need parts, Caterpillar is there to take care of us quickly, usually within 24 hours. The financial arm of Caterpillar has been a great tool as well as the Caterpillar access account—if you have repairs, you can pay them within a certain timeline. We also use Caterpillar rental so if a piece of equipment goes down, we can rent a piece of Cat equipment so we can continue operations.

Expanding the Recycling Side of the Business

In addition to hauling and landfill operation, PDC owns three permitted and operating transfer stations throughout central Illinois—Morgan County Transfer Station, Wiggins Transfer Station and a transfer Station in Clinton that operates at the landfill and handles recycling. Says Chris, “We’ve always recycled cardboard and office paper, but within the last five years, our single-stream collection efforts have really taken off and part of the biggest reason for that is in the city of Peoria, we won the city collection contract in 2010, continuing the single-stream recycling program here with 95-gallon totes. We’ve always provided recycling on the commercial side, but we’ve really started doing more on the residential side. It seems that every municipal contract that we’ve bid on or tried to extend, we push single-stream recycling program. Even though it is most concentrated in the Peoria market, we are definitely doing it in our Clinton, Champagne, Morton, and Jacksonville markets as well. It is has become part of the business more and more.”

Managing the Economy

Although PDC’s customer base is shifting as a result of an unstable economy, Royal emphasizes that PDC continuously works on being out in front of their customers and trying listening to their needs.

“In order to respond to the flat growth that we’ve experienced, we are trying to provide new services, get into new markets, get new contracts and tow the line on spending. By getting into the hazardous waste business right from the beginning, it has really helped our business. I think this partnership with Kuusokaski is an example of our company finding these needs and niches and responding to them in order to help the company grow in the face of this downturn.”

In fact, earlier this year PDC acquired McCullough Disposal, the largest hauler in Woodford County. Also, one of the larger municipalities started offering a yard waste collection service and PDC extended that contract. In late 2012, PDC also acquired Armstrong Disposal, a company north of Jacksonville, IL serving Morgan and Cask Counties.

Community Involvement

PDC is very involved in the communities they serve, whether it is holding e-waste events for the district or Chris, Jeff and Matt serving on different boards throughout Peoria County, including Peoria Production, Saint Francis Foundation, Salvation Army, Easter Seals, Boy Scouts and more. Says Royal, “We are very active in our local community here as far as raising funds and being out in front of projects for the disadvantaged population. We host tours of the facilities very frequently and take a lot of pride in appearance of our facilities. Last week, the chairman of the Peoria City/County Landfill Committee addressed a group of interested citizens at our corporate office about the Peoria City/County Landfill project. We recently gave officials from Hopedale and Tremont, which are the two closest municipalities near the Indian Creek Landfill, a tour of the facility. We are constantly providing these type of outreach programs.”

With the commodity price and tax benefits associated with compressed natural gas (CNG), more companies are developing natural gas filling stations. PDC worked with Clean Energy Fuels Corporation to strategically design and construct and operate a CNG fueling station at its West Peoria

hauling operation. “On the CNG highway, we are actually the only CNG commercial fueling station between Chicago and St. Louis, Omaha and Indianapolis—we’ve become a CNG retailer. When the stations were opened in March 2012, PDC invited the county board, the hospitals, T. Boone Pickens, Doug Overhelmond, Congressman Shocke, Senator Haler, Scott Cecil and various city council people to the open house. We are always looking to partner with other people as far as opportunities of that nature,” explains Chris.

Training and Safety

When it comes to their own employees, PDC implemented a behavioral-based training program a few years ago. Based on a point system, PDC employees can earn points by attending meetings, getting compliments from the managers, etc. Depending on the number of points they’ve earned, PDC contracts with a company called SIMS that has a catalog of products that employees can get as an award. Says Chris, “These various incentives under this program really helps drive our EMR rating down. We are really proud that now we are below 1.00. However, because training and safety are constants to keeping employees safe, we are always looking ways to re-tool that program.”

PDC’s Health and Safety Officer, John Davis, and his Assistant, Dave Voss, visit the different landfill operations once a month to observe and do training. John and Dave also perform monthly safety audits and work with the managers to make sure that they are having daily and weekly safety meetings, driven by the corporate office. In addition every facility has rotating signs that relay safety messages to employees, such as “Don’t Lift Something Heavy”. For new employees there is rigorous screening process at the beginning of the hiring period in order to make sure they can perform certain tasks. Once they get through the pre-screening, supervisors spend a good week with them on the truck, showing them how to operate it and providing different safety techniques.

Investing in the Future

PDC is especially proud of the fact that it has expanded three landfills in the last 10 years, which accounts for over 40 million new tons of disposal capacity. PDC/Area is also involved in a methane gas-to-electricity conversion process at its Clinton Landfill facility and is considering expanding this technology to its Indian Creek Landfill in the next couple of years. PDC expects to develop a methane gas-to-electricity plant at the Peoria City/County Landfill No. 3 Facility sometime after it is up and running and can justify the capital investment. “What’s really getting difficult is that the public does not want to dispose of their waste in a landfill—they want to see more recycling, they want to see more reuse, they want to see more waste diversion from landfills. However, landfills are always going to have to be part of the equation. I think that these things we are doing, like the Citizens Convenience Center at Peoria City/County Landfill No. 3, single-stream recycling programs, investing in CNG fueling stations and strategic partnerships with international recycling firms like Kuusakoski will continue to shape and define our growing business. We’re going to diversify more, we are going to expand into the recycling business, we are going to handle different waste streams because of new environmental regulations that are on the verge of implementation by the EPA,” says Chris.

PDC is also helping out the utility industry by managing coal combustion byproducts. Chris explains that EPA is currently looking at implementing a regulation that requires coal combustion byproducts to be disposed in Subtitle D landfills. Some of these utility companies don’t have the land to build their own on-site landfill to accommodate their own generation of coal combustion byproduct waste. For those utilities that don’t have the necessary space, they will rely on companies like PDC to take care of their wastes, but the material has to be treated and moisturized before disposal because it is extremely dusty and can cause fugitive dust emissions at the active face of the landfill. “We are always looking for niche markets to help grow the company because let’s face it, the waste industry is a mature one,” continues Chris. “I believe we are turning from a waste disposal company to a waste materials management company, which means we are going to get more into waste processing and recycling. That’s the path we are on.”

