

## Conover company uses recycling technology to bring in cash

By [Richard Gould](#) | Hickory Daily Record

Robert Turner spends his workdays recycling huge chunks of polystyrene packing material by tossing it into a chipper that decimates the stuff and sends the resultant tiny balls of foam into a hopper. From there, it gets melted and extruded from the machine like toothpaste from a tube.

Once the machine's produced a roughly 10-pound pile of toasty polystyrene, Turner slices through the warm, gooey stuff with a putty knife and tamps it down with his shoe to form a pizza-shaped disk that will be hard and smooth to the touch once it cools.

The disks are then crated up and sold to a buyer who pelletizes them so they can be used to make anything from decking and park benches to toys. Some have even been known to paint the disks and use them as stone pavers.

"Every time I throw this in here, I'm glad it's not going into the landfill," said Turner as he lobbed another chunk of foam into the chipper.

Polystyrene foam is the ubiquitous packing material that cushions just about every fragile item boxed up on the shelves of America's stores. It's generally referred to as Styrofoam, but technically that's a trademarked name owned by the Dow Chemical Co. and refers specifically to polystyrene products made by that company.

Polystyrene has been around since 1942 and it's become a major part of the commercial waste stream for a lot of companies that pay to have it hauled off to the landfill.

It's not too tough to recycle, but it can be prohibitively expensive to transport to facilities equipped to process polystyrene because it's so bulky and light, said Hickory Solid Waste Manager John Yvars. Of course, shipping's no longer a problem once about 100 square feet of polystyrene goes through the densifier and gets reduced to a single pizza-sized disk.

Jeff Huffman, Corporate Purchasing and Facilities manager for the Hendricks Furniture Group, saw that his company was spending a lot of money to dispose of their unneeded polystyrene, plastic sheeting and cardboard once their furniture had been delivered to their showrooms. He realized that what had been a drain on the company had the potential to become a new revenue stream and he decided to purchase the equipment needed to process the waste material for recycling.

Now the Hendricks Furniture Group's semitrucks go to the showrooms laden with furniture and return stuffed with packing materials to be recycled.

The cardboard and plastics balers and polystyrene processor were installed in August, and since then, they've saved the company a consistent \$5,600 per month in landfill fees. Huffman projects the company will make \$101,000 this year from selling what it used to pay to throw away.

Hendricks Furniture Group's recycling program, called Recycling Unlimited, has been so successful it is now accepting polystyrene, plastic and cardboard from several area businesses for free.

This allows the businesses to avoid landfill fees without having to invest in prohibitively expensive machinery.

"We provide the labor and the equipment," said Huffman.

When customers express an interest in taking their packing waste to Recycling Unlimited instead of the landfill, Huffman sits down with them to show them how much money they can save by recycling and points out that the commercial waste stream contains a much narrower spectrum of material than residential streams and is apt to benefit heavily from effective recycling programs.

Recycling Unlimited isn't running at full capacity yet, but Huffman said that when that point is reached, "We will expand and add more equipment."

Robert Turner spends his workdays recycling huge chunks of polystyrene packing material by tossing it into a chipper that decimates the stuff and sends the resultant tiny balls of foam into a hopper. From there, it gets melted and extruded from the machine like toothpaste from a tube.

Once the machine's produced a roughly 10-pound pile of toasty polystyrene, Turner slices through the warm, gooey stuff with a putty knife and tamps it down with his shoe to form a pizza-shaped disk that will be hard and smooth to the touch once it cools.

The disks are then crated up and sold to a buyer who pelletizes them so they can be used to make anything from decking and park benches to toys. Some have even been known to paint the disks and use them as stone pavers.

"Every time I throw this in here, I'm glad it's not going into the landfill," said Turner as he lobbed another chunk of foam into the chipper.

Polystyrene foam is the ubiquitous packing material that cushions just about every fragile item boxed up on the shelves of America's stores. It's generally referred to as Styrofoam, but technically that's a trademarked name owned by the Dow Chemical Co. and refers specifically to polystyrene products made by that company.

Polystyrene has been around since 1942 and it's become a major part of the commercial waste stream for a lot of companies that pay to have it hauled off to the landfill.

It's not too tough to recycle, but it can be prohibitively expensive to transport to facilities equipped to process polystyrene because it's so bulky and light, said Hickory Solid Waste Manager John Yvars. Of course, shipping's no longer a problem once about 100 square feet of polystyrene goes through the densifier and gets reduced to a single pizza-sized disk.

Jeff Huffman, Corporate Purchasing and Facilities manager for the Hendricks Furniture Group, saw that his company was spending a lot of money to dispose of their unneeded polystyrene, plastic sheeting and cardboard once their furniture had been delivered to their showrooms. He realized that what had been a drain on the company had the potential to become a new revenue stream and he decided to purchase the equipment needed to process the waste material for recycling.

Now the Hendricks Furniture Group's semitrucks go to the showrooms laden with furniture and return stuffed with packing materials to be recycled.

The cardboard and plastics balers and polystyrene processor were installed in August, and since then, they've saved the company a consistent \$5,600 per month in landfill fees. Huffman projects the company will make \$101,000 this year from selling what it used to pay to throw away.

Hendricks Furniture Group's recycling program, called Recycling Unlimited, has been so successful it is now accepting polystyrene, plastic and cardboard from several area businesses for free.

This allows the businesses to avoid landfill fees without having to invest in prohibitively expensive machinery.

"We provide the labor and the equipment," said Huffman.

When customers express an interest in taking their packing waste to Recycling Unlimited instead of the landfill, Huffman sits down with them to show them how much money they can save by recycling and points out that the commercial waste stream contains a much narrower spectrum of material than residential streams and is apt to benefit heavily from effective recycling programs.

Recycling Unlimited isn't running at full capacity yet, but Huffman said that when that point is reached, "We will expand and add more equipment."