

WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

CNG waste trucks aren't just for the big players

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By Shawn Wright | WRN reporter

Aug. 8 -- Little by little, more refuse and recycling haulers around the country are mingling their petroleum-based fleets with compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles.

Grand Junction, Colo., recently put four CNG Mack TerraPro refuse trucks into use – the first CNG's to operate in western Colorado, the city said.

On the other side of the country, Chesapeake, Va.-based TFC Recycling, which handles recycling for homes, businesses and schools in the Mid-Atlantic region, unveiled its first CNG powered truck last month.

"We really looked at it from what's better for the environment," TFC President Michael Benedetto said. "At the end of the day, we want to do what's right."

TFC's truck is manufactured by Autocar LLC and cost a little more than \$300,000.

Grand Junction's CNG trucks cost \$250,000 per vehicle, which is about \$25,000 more than a regular Mack diesel refuse truck. Tim Barker, fleet supervisor for Grand Junction, said the city will recover the difference of the cost of the truck in fuel savings within the next two years.

"And we'll see savings for the remainder of their lifespan," he said. "Our goal is to have the sanitation division totally switched over."

Grand Junction operates an all-Mack fleet of 12 refuse trucks, which includes the new TerraPro models – three automated side-loading units for residential refuse collection and a front-loading unit for commercial collection.

Along with the cost of TFC's trucks, Benedetto said, there are other adjustments and challenges to using the CNG vehicle. There is no CNG filling station in the area that TFC is aware of, Benedetto said, and the company will need to adjust its collection routes to ensure the CNG vehicle is able to be fueled.

For Grand Junction, access to CNG will not be an issue. In April, the city built its first public CNG station.

"It was kind of a chicken-and-the-egg thing," Barker said. "Why would we buy vehicles if we have no place to fill them? And why would we put in a fill station, if we have nothing to fill them with? So, our city manager got behind the idea; we bit the bullet and ordered the trucks before a fuel station was even built."

Grand Junction initially plans to tap western Colorado's natural gas resources, in addition to also investigating the possibility of converting methane gas from the city's Persigo Wastewater Treatment to CNG.

TFC's new vehicle will have a lower carbon footprint because it burns 30% cleaner than diesel fuel and will generate 15% less noise, the company said. According to the California Air Resources Board, trucks that run on CNG emit 20% fewer carbon emissions than those running on diesel.

With more than 140 trucks in service, TFC said it would like to standardize its fleet to CNG. The company plans to purchase more of the trucks in the near future, Benedetto said, and isn't ruling out buying from different manufacturers.

"We are in the process of buying five more CNG vehicles and expect to have them in before the end of the year," Benedetto said. "Apparently, Mack [Truck] may be sold out of CNG and Autocar appears to have some chassis available."

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