

GREEN FLEET OF THE MONTH

Choice is clear



Refuse fleet begins incorporating CNG vehicles

The way Glen Miller sees it, compressed natural gas (CNG) is a nice fit for his South Florida refuse fleet, both from an environmental and cost standpoint. The chairman and CEO of Choice Environmental Services even believes the decision to purchase CNG vehicles might result in additional contracts for the hauler.



"The positive feedback we've gotten, not only from the waste community, but from [community and political leaders]" could result in additional business, Miller says. "A couple of towns we're looking at are considering us because of this, so there is a marketing advantage."

Choice put ten CNG trucks into operation last November in Fort Lauderdale to support a new contract for disposal services. The company now operates 12 CNG trucks in its fleet of 125 with plans to add many more.

"The long-term plan is to try and convert as many trucks [to CNG] as possible," Miller says. "Right now, we have a commitment to run 30 trucks as [part of the Fort Lauderdale contract]." He adds that Choice will consider deploying additional CNG trucks as part of any new contracts the company obtains. In fact, Miller envisions more cities requiring alternative fuel vehicles as part of contracts.

The vehicles are built on an

Autocar chassis with Hercules ASL bodies supplied by E-Z Pack Manufacturing and are fully automated residential collection vehicles with high compaction bodies. The trucks are powered by a Cummins Westport engine and "hauling 12 or 13 tons easily without any difference from the diesel trucks," Miller says.

"CNG was something Choice decided to do way back in 2008 when diesel prices hit that \$4.50 per gallon range," Miller says. "We looked at options to lower our [fuel] costs. We found out how clean it burns, how much quieter the trucks are...CNG seems to make the perfect sense for us."

According to Ray Peraino, director of special projects, the company has also seen an increase in driver productivity because the vehicles are fueled at night rather than during the course of a day.

Despite the advantages of the trucks, which are estimated to reduce emissions 25% over diesel engines—the equivalent of removing 300 cars daily from the roads for each truck deployed—the lack of natural gas infrastructure is a problem, Peraino says.

The solution? Peraino says that Choice needed to build its own infrastructure—and the company is doing just that. Using grant money to help offset the cost, Choice built a facility in Fort Lauderdale with the help of Clean Energy Fuels, which specializes in natural gas fueling stations. Plans for a second facility are in the works as well. Miller says Choice hopes to have the center operational, and

open to the public, in 2011.

"It will bring additional revenue by letting other people fill up there," Miller says, adding that it will "help offset our costs and it's good for the community. We think there are a lot of smaller fleets out there" that would use natural gas if they could afford it. Peraino adds that the cost to build a facility is at least \$1.5 million, not including land purchase. By buying the fuel in bulk, however, the hope is to reduce costs, quicken the return on investment, and provide positive benefits for the communities in which Choice operates.

Unlike diesel fuel, which requires offshore pumping and trucking to a station, natural gas arrives at the Choice facility via underground pipes, just like it would arrive at a personal residence. Because of this, the supply of the fuel is not affected by hurricanes and other events that tend to disrupt diesel supplies.

It's not just the purchase of CNG vehicles that contributes to Choice's environmental responsibility. Peraino says the company has also purchased from Peterbilt 22 new trucks with 2010-emissions compliant engines. "We had the choice of going with pre [2010] emissions trucks because there is certainly plenty of those out there, but in keeping with our philosophy to be as green as possible," Choice chose the newer models, despite the higher price tag.

In the end, when it comes to environmental commitment, for this refuse hauler, the choice is clear.

—BRIAN STRAIGHT