

# Collected Thoughts

GUEST COMMENTARY  
BY TONY CIOFALO

## A Natural Progression

The waste industry's shift from diesel to natural gas has a historical precedent.

The waste industry's shift from diesel to natural gas appears to mirror the shift from gasoline to diesel fuel in the recent past. The Class 3-8 truck market saw the virtual elimination of gasoline as a fuel source between 1977 and 2002 driven by an increase in gasoline prices, a comparative advantage for higher-efficiency and lower cost diesel engines, and regulatory changes. The Class 8 truck market went from 65 percent diesel to 97 percent diesel between 1977 and 2002 (Source: Argonne National Laboratory, "Analysis of Major Trends In U.S. Commercial Trucking, 1977-2002"). I believe the recent moves in the refuse market show we are in the midst of a similarly profound shift to natural gas.

Why? By using natural gas, pollution is reduced approximately 23 percent compared to diesel trucks. Engine noise levels are reduced

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significantly, a benefit for residential neighborhoods in cities and in suburbs. And most importantly, the cost of natural gas fuel is significantly less than diesel, a savings of \$1.50 or more per gallon. This means that a truck using 10,000

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gallons per year saves the owner/operator around \$15,000 in fuel costs.

Nearly every type of refuse truck is available with natural gas fueling, and refuse fleets have reported meaningful fuel and maintenance cost savings over diesel. Waste Management recently announced that it had deployed the 1,000th natural gas truck in its fleet. Further, the company noted in press reports, roughly 80 percent of the trucks it is purchasing this year will be fueled by natural gas. Republic Services also stated that a substantial portion of its new vehicle purchases would run on natural gas.

It is a mistake to assume that this shift pertains only to large fleets. My company, Choice Environmental, was the first refuse company in Florida to convert a portion of our fleet (currently consisting of 14 automated side loaders) to compressed natural gas (CNG) fuel. We have plans to expand our fleet of CNG trucks, and can confirm the significant savings in fuel and

operating costs.

Central Jersey Waste & Recycling was the first company in New Jersey to convert a portion of their fleet to natural gas. Meanwhile, Homewood Disposal in the Chicago metro area recently made the deci-

sion to convert to CNG. Increasing availability of public CNG fueling stations has enabled small fleets to make the conversion.

An added benefit, of which we all can be proud, is that every gallon of natural gas fuel used means one less gallon of oil that needs to be imported, helping achieve our national goal of energy security. North America is the source for 98 percent of the natural gas we use and the country has a supply lasting well over a century. T. Boone Pickens, keynote speaker at the 2011 WasteExpo in Dallas, recently stated that the United States is spending \$1 million per minute for imported oil. That's a figure that should get every American's attention. ■

**What are your thoughts on Ciofalo's take on the transition to natural gas fuel? Comment on this article at [Waste360.com](http://Waste360.com) and join the conversation!**

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