

Reduce, reuse, reclaim

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North Meck reclamation center's green dreams could lead to solar power

HUNTERSVILLE – Say the words reclamation center or landfill, and you might think of recycling. But alternative energy?

Yet, that's just how Mike Griffin looks at his family's North Mecklenburg C&D Recycling Center on Holbrooks Road. Griffin Brothers already produces one form of alternative energy – wood – and in just a few years, it could tap the sun with a solar energy farm.

Griffin Brothers is recycling half of the construction debris – measured by weight – trucked to the center. The two largest sources of recycled material are wallboard that is reused from construction projects and "clean wood" leftover at building sites.

Griffin Brothers puts that wood through a large mobile grinder, chops it into small chips and sells most of those chips to a manufacturer in Lancaster, S.C., that uses the wood to fire its boilers. That wood becomes even more valuable if more companies invest in wood-fired boilers, including Duke Energy, which is considering whether it could replace coal with wood, Griffin said.

By grinding up the leftover wallboard, Griffin Brothers gets gypsum dust, which it can sell to fertilizer makers, and bits of gypsum-encrusted paper, which provides a great floor covering in large chicken houses.

The company also recycles pieces of concrete block, bricks or stone, grinding them into large and small pieces that construction companies can use for riprap, to stop erosion, or in building roads.

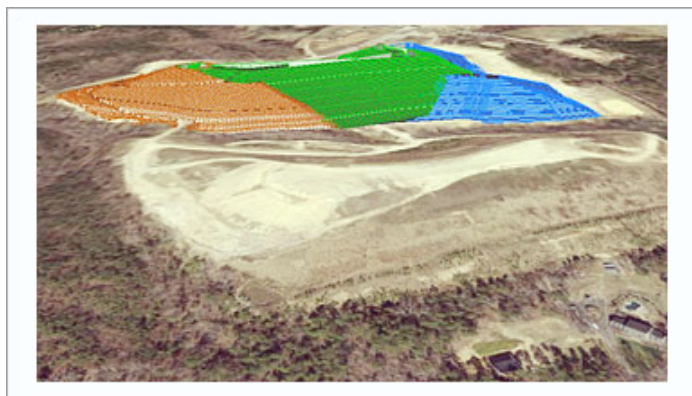
Even so, the company's recycling efforts only break even by themselves. The value to the company is in using landfill space for burying materials it can't reuse, Mike Griffin said.

He came to the Huntersville town board last week, asking the town to give the company an indefinite extension on the zoning it needs to dispose of construction debris at the Holbrooks Road site. That zoning will expire in 2011, but if the town removes the time limitation, his family's company will have even more reason to recycle as much as it can, Griffin said. Their recycling efforts have extended the life of the site because much less garbage is going into the ground.

And if the town allows Griffin Bros. to also fill 2 to 3 acres of land between its two existing fill sites, the company has plans to use all that land – once finished – for a solar farm. Mike Griffin said the company's research shows such a field could produce a "significant" amount of electricity.

If allowed to use that entire area, which will take a decade or more, the company will have about 20 acres with a good southern exposure to the sun, some sloped to the south and the rest on an elevated, plateau-like area.

As the cost of solar collectors continues to drop, Griffin said the company could install its first large solar panels in about three years on about 3 or 4 acres with the right exposure.



This graphic illustrates the envisioned configuration of Griffin Brothers' North Mecklenburg landfill. The brown section is closed now, the blue section is active and the green section is a segment the company is asking town permission to open in the future. In a few years, Griffin hopes to begin installing solar panels on the brown sloping side as well as the gray land in the foreground. Once the reclamation center is filled, the solar farm would also cover the top of all three sections, bringing the solar field to 20 acres altogether. *Courtesy of Griffin Brothers*

Reclamation center hearing

Griffin Brothers' plans and requests for annexation and a franchise agreement come before the Huntersville Planning

Board on Nov. 17. The meeting starts at 6:30 p.m.
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