

SORT BY NUMBERS

PLANET POLICE ROUTES OUT THE HEAVY ORGANICS



Louis Tarentino and his E.O.M.S. recycling firm formed a subsidiary to collect and haul food residuals to a composting site.

Recycling firm takes critical steps to separate compostables by weight and get generators to save money via more careful collection.

BAKERIES and food manufacturers in Massachusetts are saving dough by having their dough and other compostables collected separately from their trash. E.O.M.S., a recycling company in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts, started Planet Police, a new division that is collecting food residuals from these businesses and hauling them to a compost facility.

Louis Tarentino started E.O.M.S. (Environmental Operations Management Services) Food & Paper Inc. in 1995 as a food service and paper products distributor. Tarentino first got into recycling by collecting cardboard from his food service clients, including bakeries, delis, restaurants, food manufacturers, and liquor stores and convenience stores. "My customers would flatten their cardboard boxes and I would collect them for free as an extra service," explains Tarentino. In 1997, he expanded the cardboard collection service to noncustomers including furniture stores, hardware stores and auto body shops. "Businesses would say there's nothing I can buy from you, but I would like the cardboard service, so I began putting two- to ten-cubic yard dumpsters out at their sites," he says.

Tarentino started a second company, E.O.M.S. Recycling, to offer trash collection and expanded recycling services. Tarentino got the idea of collecting food residuals by talking to other trash haulers. "I kept hearing the same complaint from haulers that restaurants, donut shops and bakeries have very heavy waste," he explains. "The profit margins for waste haulers are very slim, so some haulers were working at cost to collect trash from restaurants."

His restaurant customers for recycling also were complaining. "The restaurants were saying that their trash rates were outrageous, and a lot higher than that of the retail store next door," says Tarentino. "They were questioning why they were paying so much more. Rubbish in our area is dumped or tipped at a rate of \$90/pick up. Trash haulers figure out the rate they will charge by looking at what industry the business is in, the size of the business, the size of the dumpster, and what the industry average weights are for that type of business. That formula is heavier for restaurants than for retail stores or offices. It sounded to me like there was a need for a food waste collection service, and we decided to find out how heavy the food waste actually was."

In July and August 2000, E.O.M.S. did a two-month pilot with three donut shops to determine how much of the material in their dumpsters could be composted. E.O.M.S. collected donuts, muffins, bagels, dough and coffee grinds and weighed them on a portable scale before hauling them to a licensed compost facility. "I was impressed because I had no idea how heavy this stuff actually was," says Tarentino. "That is when we realized that there would be a need for food waste col-

lection as trash rates increase in the future."

In 2001, Tarentino closed his food distribution business and focused full-time on expanding E.O.M.S. Recycling, which now collects recyclables from commercial and industrial businesses. Materials collected include cardboard; paper; aluminum cans, glass and plastic containers; metal; pallets; wood waste; stone; granite; computers and monitors; printer and copier cartridges; fluorescent bulbs; and yard waste. E.O.M.S. has 19 employees and a fleet of 14 trucks including front end loaders, rear loaders, rubbish packers, tractor-trailers and side loader recycle trucks. The company also provides rollofts to customers.

ROLLING OUT THE CARTS

E.O.M.S. rolled out its food waste collection program in 2007, forming a subsidiary called Planet Police. It purchased a 1998 Peterbilt side loader truck and a Cardinal digital scale to weigh the compostables, as well as dumpsters and 65-gallon Otto toters for food waste collection. Collection service started to be offered in February 2007.

Planet Police's target market was small generators of food waste such as bakeries, donut shops, restaurants, and bread and pastry manufacturers. "Unless they are fortunate enough to have a pig farmer in the area, these small businesses have no options for getting rid of their food waste," notes Tarentino. "Large businesses like supermarkets generating large volumes of compostables have giant compactor units. We're showing them that you don't have to be a supermarket or have a pig farmer in the neighborhood to compost food."

Planet Police started by approaching some of E.O.M.S.'s existing bakery and food

manufacturer customers. "We have a history with them already," says Tarentino. The food waste collection service is offered for a month or so at no charge. "We do this to see if there is a need for it, if it will work and if the employees will follow through," he explains. "We also want to get customers interested in it and show them that they can pay less than what they were paying once we pull the heavy material out." He said one bakery was surprised to find that it was putting 3,000 pounds of dough in a two-cubic-yard Planet Police dumpster every week. "With Planet Police collecting the dough, the bakery was able to get a much cheaper quote on trash. It's not being treated like a heavy bakery anymore but more like the retail store next door."

As of mid-July 2007, Planet Police was servicing 20 customers in five towns, and hadn't lost any yet. "That's because we create value in the form of a price decrease on their overall disposal bill," says Tarentino.

Customers are provided with either front load dumpsters in two, four, and six cubic yard sizes, or two-wheeled, 65-gallon toters with lids. A yellow sticker is affixed to the dumpsters and toters with the words "Food Waste Only" in English and Spanish. Waxed cardboard and anything that is compostable, including kitchen prep, vegetables, dough, coffee grounds, products that are out of date, such as day-old donuts and muffins, and products that are out of code are accepted in the containers.

Compostables are collected two days a week in the side loader, as well as with a front loader Mack truck. The two Planet Police drivers haul the compostables to the We-Care Environmental LLC compost facility in Marlborough, Massachusetts.

The company hasn't had odor problems yet with the toters or dumpsters. "So far, with the customers we are servicing and what we are picking up, the material hasn't smelled," Tarentino says. "Dough, muffins, bagels and coffee grounds have a somewhat pleasant smell." He knows that could change when Planet Police starts collecting food residuals from restaurants. "We've asked potential restaurant customers to keep chicken and beef out of our toters to prevent odor problems. We don't think it will be a hardship for the restaurants because the bulk of their food waste is pasta, potatoes and vegetable prep, and not meat. It's not worth it to have a whole dumpster smell because of five pounds of chicken."

The company purchased biodegradable BioTuff liners for the toters to keep them clean, but customers haven't had to use them yet. "The customer is responsible for keeping the toters clean, but we haven't had problems because the material, be it flour or coffee grinds, falls right out," says Tarentino.

"I'll go into a facility and watch how the trash and food waste flows and what their system is for dumping it into containers. We have to make it work for the customer and set them up with a program that will be least disruptive," says Tarentino.



Target markets are small generators of food waste (bakeries, restaurants, etc.). In five towns, customers are provided with front load dumpsters or two-wheeled toters.

TRAINING THE GENERATORS

Tarentino spends up to a day at each customer's business to figure out the best way to collect the compostables. "I'll go into a facility and watch how the trash and food waste flows and what their system is for dumping it into containers," he says. "We have to make it work for the customer and set them up with a program that will be the least disruptive. You can't take away from a customer's efficiencies. That is why we offer some dumpsters and some toters." Upon request, Planet Police provides signage to put up in their food prep areas. Tarentino also shows the employees what can and cannot be composted. "We're not going to do the work for them," he notes. "Making this work requires the cooperation of both the customer and its employees."

He follows up with each business until the program is working correctly. So far, customers have been good about keeping contaminants like plastic out of the compostables. "We haven't had to reject a load yet," he adds.

RATES AND EXPANSION

Tarentino estimates that the cost of having organics collected for composting is 60 percent of what it would be to pay a trash hauler to collect them for landfilling or incineration. He says some customers now use Planet Police to haul their food residuals, cardboard and trash. "Customers who do this get the benefits of better service, one phone number to remember, and one invoice at the end of the month," he says.

The company hopes to add restaurants, and expand beyond its current five-town collection route. Tarentino says the new business is not taking off as quickly as he would like. "People don't know we exist yet, it's just word-of-mouth. I've got to get out and sell it more. I've been going after my own customer base and getting them on board one by one, but we haven't gone out and advertised the service yet."

Tarentino thinks there is plenty of room for Planet Police to grow. "It reminds me of the days when E.O.M.S. tried to get people to take a second dumpster for corrugated cardboard," he says. "Not everyone was on board with the idea of recycling cardboard or saw the value in it, and it's amazing how big that has grown."

"Food waste collection is not something we are taking over that someone else was already doing," he adds. Tarentino says he is not aware of any competitors, including pig farmers, in Planet Police's service area who are collecting compostables. "It's not a cookie cutter business. You need to be able to do the math and the logistics, and figure out the changes in dumpster sizes and numbers of pickups the customer will need once the food waste is removed." — M.F.T. ■