

The following excerpt was taken from the current issue of MSW Management.



Integrated software for routing, scales, and accounting helps users become more efficient in all facets of the business.

By Janis Keating

SOFTWARE USE IS PICKING UP

The solid waste business—what could be simpler? You collect trash from households and take it to the landfill. Job done.

But, of course, it's not all that simple. Which routing procedures will best allow you to serve your customers in a

timely manner while saving you costs and resources? Billings, as well as various government reports, depend upon the accurate weighing of trash taken in. Is that task as efficient as it could be?

Your landfill is limited in the amount of space it can use. Are you meeting land-use guidelines, or are you near the limit? All these questions are on waste managers' minds, unless they get some automated help. Luckily, the marketplace offers a variety of computer programs to answer these questions (allowing you to sleep a little better).

Hand-Held Technology

Carolina Software's Waste Works suite—including WasteWorks, the computer software/operating system; WasteWizard, the scalehouse portion of the software; and WasteWalker, a hand-held data collection device—can be used as a comprehensive system, or its parts can be used individually, interfacing with a variety of operating systems (www.wasteworks.com).

Iowa's Cedar Rapids/Linn County Solid Waste Agency has been using the entire suite since 1999. Office Manager Pat Myers explains how her agency uses the product.

"Works is the custom software for the landfill, and there's other uses for it. At the scalehouse, Works makes the ticket the hauler receives. We have two inbound scales; one is a drive-up window, where one of our staff weighs the truck that's come in, inputs the customer's information into WasteWorks, and hands the driver his ticket. When the driver leaves empty, the staffer weighs the difference, and that's what the hauler owes.

"The other scale is an automated station run by WasteWizard. Our regular customers—charge customers—use this lane, which has a pushbutton pad where they input their code number. The computer will then call up their information, including their stored tare weight, and the truck is weighed. Because we already know what their truck weighs with nothing in it, WasteWizard immediately knows the weight of the trash they'll unload. WasteWizard allows trucks to go faster through the scale process."

At the end of each business day, Myers downloads all the collection tickets and information into the company's server.

"WasteWorks then does billing for our charge customers; it also generates the reports we need to file with the state and federal governments. Because the program has all the data on what's been coming in, WasteWorks also lets us know when it's time to move on to another part of the landfill," Myers says.

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Even with two scales—one of them a fast automated lane—there are some times when a line of trucks piles up. For those instances, Myers's coworkers grab a WasteWalker. "This hand-held unit allows us to come up and talk to you while you're waiting in line. We input your data, and the Walker produces a little receipt for you. We can then accept the money for whatever you have to dump. At the end of the day, all the Walker's data is downloaded into WasteWorks."

For her operation, Myers finds WasteWorks does it all. "[As for] the software we had before, the company went out of business," she says. "But this software was the lifeline of our business. We have to be able to rely on it. Our agency looked at several different software companies; WasteWorks was easiest to use, and did everything we needed it to do—quickly and accurately. It also interfaces with other programs we use, such as Excel. That's one of the great things about WasteWorks—it's so easy to work with the data. The accounting department uses it, too—for example, if they might want to track a certain product that came in, like hazardous waste. WasteWorks's technical support is beyond anything—we absolutely love it."

Down the road, at Des Moines, IA's Metro Waste Authority, WasteWorks has been online since 1997.

"Our organization is responsible for one whole county, parts of three other counties, and 16 cities, some of which spill over into other counties. However, Polk County is the main county we serve," says Chief Financial Officer Ron Lacey. "We've been using WasteWorks since the day we opened our new scalehouse."

Two of the authority's lines are automated with WasteWizard. Sometimes Lacey's organization uses WasteWalker, too: "We use that if we lose power or something, and then we can download to the main computer when it's back up."

Des Moines switched software when it upgraded its computer system. "We were running old software on an IBM AS400, and we wanted to go to computers running Microsoft," Lacey explains. "The old software company went out of business, so we went with WasteWorks. For our accounting needs, we use Great Plains Dynamics software, pulling figures from WasteWorks to the general ledger, and it works very well. We're also able to glean monthly totals for sales and collection figures, and we invoice from WasteWorks. We can also run reports into Excel spreadsheets."

Does the software help him run day-to-day operations on the landfill itself? "No, our operations manager has a GPS [global positioning system], and his crews manage the system of which area to fill, when to close an area, et cetera. Our permit only allows us to go so many feet high. However, the operations manager uses a lot of reports off WasteWorks to find out how many tons, how many trucks come in per day. We run curbside pickup for recycling, and WasteWorks does the billing for that; we charge the city so much per household for pickups."

For regular customers, information about the trash coming in is coded into the WasteWizard keypad. "Although lots of customers don't give us a tare weight, when they use the keypad at the scale, drivers will punch in truck and customer numbers, a six-digit combination. They also key in a two-digit material number. For example, 11 is residential waste, 22 is commercial waste. There's another code for yardwaste. Only four types of trash go through our automated lanes: residential, commercial, yardwaste, and construction and demolition." As his company also operates a hazardous-waste facility for households and small businesses, the WasteWorks software tracks loads and bills those people.

"We were first in Iowa to pick Carolina Software," Lacey continues. "I think we saw three different software companies and their presentations; then we took trips to Kansas and Nebraska landfills to see how other landfills used software. We like that Carolina's system is easier for our people; you don't have to be well-acquainted with a computer to use it. It's very user friendly—just mouse and key input."

Des Moines Metro Waste Authority operates a landfill, a transfer station, a compost facility, and a regional collection center for hazardous waste; Lacey has found that WasteWorks saves the authority money. "The transfer station used to have a scalehouse with an employee; now it's automated. Using the software saved one employee at

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the landfill, too. We pay a maintenance fee to Carolina Software, and then we get annual software updates—we don't have to worry about them. Carolina e-mails updates to us, and we download them. I am happy with WasteWorks—it's very reliable and very seldom goes down.”

Meanwhile in California, at the County of Sacramento Kiefer Landfill, Waste Management Program Manager Doug Kobold is now at his second WasteWorks operation. “I worked in a previous county and put in Carolina's software there,” he says. “Kiefer Landfill put in the WasteWorks program in February 2002.”

Kiefer Landfill operates one large landfill and one transfer station, serving 152,000 households from the unincorporated areas of Sacramento County. “The county is vertically integrated,” Kobold explains. “We collect trash, and we also take in tonnage from commercial haulers and residents. We sometimes also take refuse from adjoining counties.

“We also use WasteWizard,” he goes on. “At the landfill we have one ‘express lane,’ which is automated. Primarily just the county trucks use this particular lane, because we have input all the information about these trucks, such as their tare weights, et cetera. Trucks from the city of Sacramento could use it, too. At our transfer station, city and county trucks use one of two Wizard automated systems there; we have a second Wizard for our outgoing transfer trucks.”

Carolina Software was chosen during the landfill's request-for-proposals process. “They had the best product for our needs—not only our current needs, but also the program had expandability—it could adapt to what we might need in the future. We use WasteWorks for standard reports, although we also use Crystal Reports, which can take data from WasteWorks, for a whole host of reports—compliance, materials in and out, economic reports—some of which are used daily, some monthly.”

Kobold's computer system is Windows-based, and WasteWorks integrates with it well. “When buying new software, we wanted an off-the-shelf product rather than customized, so that any changes made to the software benefits all the customers. The software contains no special parts for a bunch of different clients. During the RFP [request for proposals] process, we asked those who bid for our business that their software had at least 200-some installations all over the country, just so we knew it wasn't a fly-by-night program that would become an orphan. We also wanted something that was flexible, so we could call in all sorts of data. We chose WasteWorks.”