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Waste hauler strives to be as green as its trucks

BYLINE: BILL CHURCH BJ contributor

Hobe Sound's largest employer may also be its greenest employer. Everyone recognizes Waste Management, Inc.'s big green garbage trucks, but not everyone knows of the company's dedication to a clean environment.

"We implement the best management practices with extensive training for drivers and for all employees," said Senior District Manager Craig Ahal, 38, who has headed the company's Martin County District for 10 years.

All drivers carry a spill kit and they're trained regularly in spill cleanup. All trucks are washed in a self-contained unit at the district headquarters facility on Bridge Road, where the wash water is collected, filtered and recycled.

"We think green, we act green and it's permeated the work force," said Jeff Sabin, district director of public sector services.

"It's part of our internal structure."

Ahal also has implemented the use locally of a bio-fuel to power his 115 trucks with a mixture of 5 percent vegetable oil and 95 percent diesel fuel. This fuel produces less soot and emissions, uses less oil, and recycles a product that would have been wasted.

A Wisconsin native, Ahal learned the business from the bottom up, beginning on the back of a truck 18 years ago. Waste Management paid for his education at Indian River Community College and he worked his way up to the lead local position.

His Martin County district serves Martin, St. Lucie, Okeechobee, Glades and northern Palm Beach counties. The trucks are based at the Bridge Road site for the most part, along with 190 employees, including drivers, mechanics, call center representatives and management.

Ahal's customer service representatives field 1,800 phone calls a week within 15 seconds on average. He said 20 seconds is considered world class, but the company is always trying to improve.

The district's drivers make more than 2.5 million pick-ups a month, and he's proud that on average just 82 are missed.

"If we do our job on the streets, we won't have phone calls," Ahal said.

Drivers and mechanics are paid between \$17 and \$22 an hour. The hiring process is stringent and training includes a two-three week course at the company's Tampa training facility and then daily training each morning at roll call before the trucks move out.

"We're professional drivers," Ahal said. "We need to look out for the other people."

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