

Catawba's Eco-Complex Is a Green Innovator

By Carol Cowan

Catawba County's award-winning EcoComplex and Resource Recovery Facility turns trash into treasure – and in the process, it's creating jobs, promoting green living and changing the way people view waste management as a whole, says Barry Edwards, director of utilities and engineering for Catawba County.

The innovative, green development is home to four businesses that use the waste byproducts of other EcoComplex partners to generate energy or create new products.

The central component is the Blackburn Resource Recovery Facility, a landfill that takes in about 680 tons of waste daily. The Gas-to-Energy Electricity Generating Facility burns the methane produced naturally in the landfill to generate electricity – enough to power roughly 1,400 homes.

Gregory Wood Products is a high-tech dimensional lumber manufacturer whose waste stream provides the raw materials for Pallet One Inc., the largest new-pallet manufacturer in the United States.

Future plans call for a bio-energy facility that will use wood waste from Gregory Wood Products and Pallet One to power a steam production plant, and a brick company says it will use that heat to fuel its kilns.

Also proposed are biodiesel research facilities in partnership with area universities, a state-of-the-art education center, greenhouse space, composting and soil amendment facilities, and other recycling operations.

In addition to the environmental benefits of near-zero internal waste, the project already has shown impressive economic results.

Over the past three years, Edwards says, the EcoComplex in its private-public partnerships has created \$35 million in taxable investments and more than 150 jobs, with an additional 115 jobs when other entities begin operation.

"The EcoComplex is creating new jobs in the green-energy, green-business, agricultural and environmental sectors," Edwards says.