

Garbage into Good

By Jeff Atkinson

At a time of record energy prices our Friday Cover Story will get you thinking the next time you take out the trash. PrimeTime's Jeff Atkinson takes us to a place in our backyard where they're turning garbage into something good.

"What are you doing Doc? I need fuel..." 23 years ago in "Back to the Future" the thought of this using garbage for gas seemed outrageous.

Well, guess what the future is now.

"This can be copied everywhere in some form...everywhere."

In southern Catawba county is the Blackburn Landfill.

Doesn't look any different from any other you've seen, but as Catawba County Utilities and Engineering Director Barry Edwards explained what they're doing here flies off the charts!

He says, "We're trying to extract as much energy and create as much commerce and create as many jobs in the private sector as we can."

They're taking methane gas, a byproduct of rotting garbage and not letting it go to waste.

Ten years ago Catawba County began drilling wells in its landfill, capturing the gas, running it through these pipes...To a special generator.

It produces electricity which the county then sells to Duke Energy to power 1,000 homes... netting the county \$78,000 a year.

EPA rules require landfills to capture their methane.

Counties spend millions of dollars on equipment.

But instead of burning it and getting nothing, which is what most counties do, Catawba County Commissioners spent \$4.5 million and ten years later reaps a windfall.

Says Edwards, "It was just simply here's the financials. It's the right thing to do. Our commission was very progressive in their thinking and they understood we had to spend money one way or the other."

Future projects for the so-called "EcoComplex" include taking canola and sunflowers they're growing at the landfill site and using them in a bio-diesel research facility they plan to build on this track of land.

Biodiesel fuel will power all the heavy equipment at the landfill.

They've also lured two wood products manufacturers that eventually be incorporated into the EcoComplex.

"It's just a beautiful thing."

And best of all no county tax dollars go into the EcoComplex.

It's supported through user fees at the landfill, from electricity they generate and sell to Duke Energy and supported by the two wood product companies that have located there.

They've basically taken their landfill and turned it into an industrial park.