

F O C U S



Recycling carpet . . . really?

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In 2008, an estimated 3.4 billion pounds of carpet were thrown into the landfill. That's billion...with a "B." That's enough carpet to cover the football field at Cowboy stadium, 141,000 times!

There is no doubt that carpet has been building up in landfills for quite some time. It takes up an estimated 1 to 2 percent of all U.S. landfill space. To help alleviate the problem, the industry created CARE.

Carpet America Recovery Effort (CARE) is a non-profit organization formed in 2002 by the carpet industry and entrepreneurs. The mission of CARE is to facilitate the carpet industry lead initiative to find market driven solutions to the diversion of post-consumer carpet from landfills to meet the time sensitive goals of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Carpet Stewardship. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was created between the carpet mills, entrepreneurs and government

agencies to set goals for diverting 40 percent of all waste carpet from landfill by 2012. This was no small task as in 2002, carpet recycling as an industry simply did not exist. At that time, manufacturers were more interested in finding ways to make carpet last longer. The challenge now with the industry is they have to create a way to de-construct something that is now designed not to fall apart.

That's where creative American know-how comes into play. Technologically there have been huge advances over the last ten years: devices such as a hand held tester that determines carpet fiber types, shredders designed to handle the issues of heavy, dirty textile products, and shearing machines that can shave the face fiber while saving the backing. On the back end, carpet mills such as Shaw, Interface and Tandus have developed industry-leading closed loop systems where they are selling carpet and then taking back old carpet to recy-

cle into new carpet. Recycling carpet is much like any recyclable product. First, a collector will accept or pick up the carpet. The collector is a valuable part of the chain as they collect, sort, weigh, bale and sometimes grind or shave the carpet to prepare it for the processor. There are so many fiber and backing types out there no processor accepts them all. Therefore, the collector will have to find a channel that is open for a particular fiber or backing type. In some cases the collector may collect a nominal rebate for the fiber they are sending in, but that fluctuates wildly. For many collectors, they have to pay to send the carpet to certain processors.

The next step is the collector sends the carpet to the processor. This is the company that may further refine the carpet into products to sell to the plastics industry, or they may actually make a product out of the carpet, such as new carpet. One innovative company in California, LA Fiber, is one of the largest processors in the United States. They make a recycled carpet padding made up exclusively of recycled carpet.

The biggest issue is the bottleneck at processing. There is simply too much carpet being produced and not enough technology or products developed that can use it to keep it all out of landfill. Until technology catches up with the supply

of old carpet and enough products are developed that can generate profits for companies investing millions into plants, equipment and personnel to develop this industry, there will always be a limited back end. CARE, along with a consortium of corporate, governmental agencies and local businesses, are currently drafting a revised MOU. They are working with local, state and national legislators to help drive legislation to encourage advances in the recycling industry.

So what can you do if you want to recycle carpet? First, contact CARE at www.carpetrecovery.org and look for a collector that is a member of CARE and has a track record of collecting different types of carpet. If there is not a collector in your area, CARE can find someone who can help in most cases. Just remember, recycling carpet generates jobs, can contribute to LEED points, and helps keep our landfills clear.

Thomas Holland, a Texas Tech graduate, brings 16 years of experience in the flooring industry to his role as President and owner of Corporate Floors and Texas Carpet Recycling. Corporate Floors has offices in Dallas, Houston, Austin and San Antonio. In 2006, Thomas started Texas Carpet Recycling, the State's only full service commercial carpet recycling company. -dn