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RDH Environmental Services on roll

RDH Environmental to add jobs, investment in reclamation processing

Premium content from Charlotte Business Journal - by Ken Elkins, Senior staff writer

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A new Rowan County company plans to create 45 jobs and spend about \$2 million to reclaim large-equipment tires and return them to their component ingredients.

[RDH Environmental Services](#) already employs about five workers at the startup plant adjacent to a Cleveland tire retreading operation.

Next, **Harvey Buhr** wants to add more production lines on site to reclaim the huge tires, some of which weigh up to 10,000 pounds.

"It's an environmentally friendly way to turn the scrap into usable materials," says Buhr, who invented the tire-handling process. An enclosed heating operation breaks down the tires to their component parts: carbon black, oil and steel. Those byproducts can then be sold and reused.

Buhr and partner **Bradley Ragan**, vice president and chief operations officer at [RDH Tire and Retread Co.](#), believe the new company is the only U.S. firm that can reclaim the oversized, off-the-road tires without shredding them.

Ragan says he and Buhr picked the Cleveland site because RDH Tire already collects the large tires. "It's a natural fit for us," Ragan says. "We already haul tires that turn out to be no good" for retreading purposes.

RDH Tire employs 70 workers at the retreading business. Buhr says the company is the largest big-tire retreader east of the Mississippi River.

RDH Environmental is housed in another building on 200 acres in western Rowan County. There, up to five-foot-tall tires from mining and construction vehicles can be processed.

Robert Van Geons, executive director of economic-development group Rowan Works, says he's impressed with the process and welcomes the jobs it brings to the county.

Buhr and Ragan would like to see the Cleveland operation replicated in other areas along the East Coast. "There is no need to truck the tires hundreds of miles," Buhr says.

He devised the process in 2009 while consulting with the federal Army Research Laboratory. He found a way to convert scrap truck tires into fuel for power generation in remote areas. From that research-and-development project, Buhr founded Hitec of Jefferson City, Mo., to commercialize the idea.

Buhr's process heats the oversized tires in a chamber for up to 10 hours. The heat breaks down the solid tires, and oil is removed from the chamber.

Ragan says he's found a customer for the steel and oil. And he will use the carbon black to make retreads at RDH Tire.

Ragan and Buhr say they didn't seek financing help for the initial stage of RDH Environmental. Local and state incentives will be sought as the company adds more production lines in Cleveland, Buhr says.

Buhr has a larger machine that can handle tires as tall as seven feet that will be installed at the Missouri Center For Waste to Energy in the summer.

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