

One man's TRASH ...

Firm to open central Ohio plant that will make building materials out of discarded foam

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Starting next year, Styrofoam headed for Franklin County's landfill will be recycled by a company that plans to set up shop in central Ohio and employ 50 people.

That Styrofoam, technically called polystyrene, will be ground up and mixed with cement and concrete into a material that can be used to build new homes or offices — and which already has been used in about 6,000 U.S. buildings.

"There's low maintenance," said Karl Holik, president of Rastra Corp., which will establish independent licensee Rastra Ohio Inc. "You don't have any mold, termites don't attack it, and polystyrene, once it's coated with cement, it becomes a noncombustible product."

The building material, about 85 percent of which is recycled polystyrene, is popular in environmental circles.

Besides finding new uses for old foam coffee cups and packaging, the product cuts home-energy costs because it is a good insulator, even if it is a little more expensive than conventional materials, said Jack Hedge, an architect with Design Group in Columbus and a board member of Green Energy Ohio.

"But most houses, because of the cracks between sidings, near windows, probably have a hole in them equivalent to the size of a garage door," he said. "This product provides a much better seal."



RASTRA CORP. PHOTOS

Workers install Rastra walls, made from recycled polystyrene and small amounts of cement and concrete. Rastra Corp. is opening a manufacturing operation in Columbus.



A thin piece of Rastra's product, which isn't combustible, can insulate a hand from a hot flame.

Recycling bulky polystyrene also frees landfill space, which was what caught the attention of the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio. SWACO owns the landfill in Jackson Township that serves Franklin and parts of surrounding counties. It is financing the venture with Rastra.

"This was part of our program to reduce what is going into landfills and to find alternative uses for polystyrene," Long said. "It takes up a huge quantity of space in our landfill, 6.7 percent on an annual basis."

Polystyrene, however, accounts for only about 0.1 percent of the weight in SWACO's landfill, which Long expects to be filled in 25 years. Eliminating the bulky polystyrene should extend the landfill's life by about 18 months, Long said.

SWACO will use a \$2 million low-interest state loan to buy equipment for Rastra. SWACO also plans to take out a \$1.5 million loan to build a 20,000-square-foot building, said Mike Long, SWACO executive director. Rastra would own the building and the equipment after leasing them for several years, Long said. The building will be made using Rastra's product.

Rastra also will spend \$2.4 million for equipment at the site, Long said. The deal hinges on city approval, because the city leases the property to SWACO, which would sublease it to Rastra.

State assistance and cooperation with SWACO helped Ohio land the operation; Florida and Nevada also were in the running, Holik said.

But the company, based in Scottsdale, Ariz., also hopes an Ohio plant can help sell the material in the eastern United States, Holik said. The product isn't yet sold in retail stores.

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