



Joel Beattie
Chase Construction North West



Michael Olen
O'Lyn Roofing



The New Faces of Recycling

CONTRACTORS SHARE THEIR ASPHALT SHINGLE RECYCLING SUCCESS STORIES *by Chris King*

Recycling has become an integral part of construction, but recycling asphalt shingles can be more difficult than recycling metal, wood or even concrete. Roofing contractors who have overcome the challenges of asphalt shingle recycling have also found their commitment to recycling has benefits beyond helping the environment. Roofing Contractor asked contractors from various parts of the country who have successfully implemented recycling programs to share their insights and experiences at the Recycling Round Table. Held at the

Wigwam Resort in Phoenix, the event allowed these peers to discuss their successes, ongoing challenges and plans for the future when it comes to recycling.

Participants included:

- Michael Olen, president of O'Lyn Roofing, Norwood, Mass.
- Joel Beattie, owner of Chase Construction North West Inc., Edgewood, Wash.
- Roger Hankins, president of Hankins Homescapes, Lansing, Mich.
- TJ Elbert, owner of Elbert Construction, Noblesville, Ind.

Different Markets, Different Realities

O'Lyn Roofing's goal is to recycle as much material as possible, according to Michael Olen. "At our office we try to run the gamut, whether it's wood recycling, asphalt shingle recycling, metal, paper and cardboard. We strive to divert 100 percent from landfills. In house, in the office, we try to run as green as possible, and we use the most fuel-efficient vehicles for the sales force and in service. But the asphalt shingle recycling is by far our biggest."

The company began recycling asphalt

TJ Elbert
Elbert Construction



shingles about six years ago, but in the Boston area recycling shingles is more expensive and time consuming than taking them to the area landfills. "Massachusetts DOT does not accept recycled asphalt in its road base, so it's a struggle," Olen said. "The market has not opened up yet to create competition in Massachusetts for recyclers. It is still a challenge to find efficient operations nearby. Our recycling plants right now are quite a distance from us, so it's still difficult on the financial side. We work with two or three companies that recycle shingles, but it's still more expensive than traditional disposal."

The other issue is transport, noted Olen. "If we're doing three, four or five containers a day, you need a company that can support that, and a lot of recycling companies can't support that, so it's tough" he said. "If we had more local support, it would be enormously different."

For Roger Hankins in Michigan, on the other hand, it's cheaper and easier to recycle than to go to the dump. "In the landfills it's about \$16 or \$16.50 to get rid of it," he said. "If you dump it off at the recycling center, it's \$12, so there is a price break. And the main recycling center is just about 4 miles from our main office."

Hankins Homescapes handles its own transport, hauling dump trailers with a one-ton dual-axle pickup. "Time is money," Hankins said. "It's 10 miles to the dump and 4 miles to the recycling center — and at the recycling center you're dumping on pavement, as opposed to the regular refuse you're driving over at the dump. If you can avoid a flat tire, you're saving yourself more time and money."

There is more labor involved, noted Hankins. "You have to tell your crew to jump through a few more hoops to separate their debris," he said. "That's where the difficulty comes in for a lot of companies."

According to Hankins, it's easy to train the crews if the company is committed. "It's like teaching an old dog new tricks," he said. "Once crews

get used to it, it becomes second nature to them."

TJ Elbert's crews have also become accustomed to recycling asphalt shingles, as well as metal, aluminum and other debris. It's cheaper to recycle the material than to take it to the landfill, so there is a built-in incentive for the crews, who are in charge of the disposal. "We've asked our crews to take the pledge to recycle, and they do recycle the vast majority of the time because it's cheaper," Elbert said.

Elbert Construction has invested in its own dump trailers because there are limitations on the types of trailers available at the recycling centers. "Some of the trailers don't dump, and they have to attach a long chain to it drag it out back," Elbert noted. "You have to ask if the recycling center does 'pull-offs' — they chain it to a machine and drag it out back. There are also some inconsistencies in our market with the recycling centers as far as the types of things other than shingles you can bring in." Some allow plastic wrappers, for example, while others don't.

However, it's the hours of operation and proximity to the jobsite that are the major obstacles posed by the recycling centers. "The hours of operation are our biggest issue," Elbert said. "They usually close at 5 o'clock. In the summertime, if we're doing a roof, we'll often work until dark. Sometimes I'll go to the landfill after dark, and I'll see 20 dualies with roofing trailers behind them lined up and think to myself, I've got to video this to show people just what an opportunity we're missing out on because it's one roofer after another, dumping shingles."

Elbert is optimistic things will improve and recycling will increase in the future. "We have to have faith it will get better," he said. "It's still cheaper to take it to the recycling center, so on the vast majority of our jobs, we're recycling everything."

In Seattle, Joel Beattie has seen the future. He sees the forces driving the recycling movement every day. "Our waste gets put on barges and gets dumped in eastern Oregon," he said. "In Puget Sound, all of our landfills are full, so it all gets hauled to Oregon by barge."

Recycling is top of mind in his area, and Beattie makes sure his company recycles everything it can. "In the Seattle market, obviously we're recycling asphalt shingles, metal, aluminum, shakes and even concrete tile," he said. "With concrete tile, it's taken to a recycling facility where it is ground up and used as filler in either concrete or asphalt, or it is used as clean fill for landscaping or construction sites. I've seen roofers driving to the landfill with loads of concrete tile, and I'll say, 'What are you doing? You could go over here and pay a fraction of the cost because they want that material.' For shake, they have a large wood recycling facility that's in the port of Tacoma. That's used for fuel in the pulp mills and other manufacturing facilities."

Asphalt shingle recycling has been available for more than a decade. Beattie detailed the history of the asphalt recycling process in Seattle. "Years ago, probably 12-15 years ago, Woodworth and Co. in Tacoma, one of the largest manufacturers of asphalt paving, opened its program up, and now it's all over the United States," he said. "They take in shingles — composition shingles and asphalt shingles — but initially they were very stringent. You couldn't have one piece of metal. The pricing kept going up, so you had to be a real Good Samaritan to recycle."

In the past five years or so, things have changed, Beattie noted. The Woodworth program became a little more lenient, and the company provided an on-staff employee to help sort material off the top before the load was dumped.

Increased competition helped spur the changes. "King County, which is the county Seattle is in, opened King County refuse, and the city of Auburn opened a recycling center," he said. "Their prices were

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quite a bit lower than Woodworth's, and as a result of the competition, Woodworth's prices began to come down. It's important in any region — if you are able to create competition within the recycling of composition asphalt shingles, that's a big deal for us as contractors."

Beattie noted that the landfill charge \$136 per ton to dump refuse, while recycling centers charge \$75 per ton to drop off shingles. "That makes a world of difference," Beattie said. "Over the year, the savings on every project adds up. When you do the math, you're cutting your disposal fees almost in half."



›Contractors from around the country who met in Phoenix for the Recycling Round Table event included (from left) Joel Beattie, Michael Olen, TJ Elbert and Roger Hankins. Photo by Karen McConnell.

Making an Impression on Homeowners

Whether it costs them money or saves them money, these contractors all agree that their recycling efforts are resonating with homeowners. Olen, Elbert, Beattie and Hankins all commended the manufacturers they work with for helping them refine their own marketing message, as well as pushing for increased recycling options in their areas.

When it comes to getting the word out to customers, O'Lyn Roofing wastes no time. "We start right off the bat with the initial phone call," Olen said. "If you are on hold, you hear about how many tons of recycled shingles are being kept out of the landfill in the course of the year. On our website there is a counter that tells

people how much tonnage that we have recycled. The marketing that we put into it includes a check-off box in our contracts that indicates that we will recycle the roof for free."

Olen is amazed how many people call his company simply because it recycles — and they track the data. "It's right on our lead sheets," he said. "We know all the information — why you called, who referred you — so we've got that little synopsis right off the bat that tells us why you called us and why you like us, so that we can continue to try to work that side of it. People specifically call us because we recycle. On our trucks, we try to really promote it and keep it in front of your face. All of paperwork says, 'We recycle.' We really try to keep pushing that issue."

Elbert makes sure recycling is part of every sales call. "We do an in-home presentation on our iPad or laptop computer that has slides that relate to shingle recycling and our pledge with Owens Corning," he said. He's found converting the amount of roofing material recycled to miles of roadway makes an impression on homeowners. "When you compare that to how many trips it would be around Highway 465 in Indianapolis, it really gets the point across," he said. "Most homeowners think it is great that we recycle, and it definitely helps us close deals with environmentally conscious people."

Beattie is a GAF Master Elite contractor and a member of the company's Certified Green Roofer program. "As part of the program, GAF gives me all of this promotional literature that we can use during in-home sales," he said. "When you are talking to the potential customer, you can show them that you've partnered with the manufacturer and that recycling is something that's important to our company."

It's another way reputable roofers can set themselves apart from the competition — especially in areas that have been subjected

to illegal dumping. "This is a big deal to the homeowner. It's an easy sell," Beattie said. "We tell homeowners that not only are we legally disposing of these shingles — we're actually recycling them. We not only want to do the right thing and do our part for the future, we want to help sell a job."

Hankins agrees that recycling can help close the deal — and pointed out that it never hurts. "All things being equal, if you're the only one who's recycling it might give you the edge that you're looking for," said Hankins. "It shows you are conscientious and are willing to go the extra mile. People generally appreciate it, and many are willing to pay more for it."

Hankins believes that the future of recycling is bright, and that the next generation of homeowners will embrace the concept. "I think this next generation is a lot more conscientious when it comes to the environment," he noted.

"I think it's our duty as business owners and leaders of the community to recycle, push recycling, and be an example to other up-and-coming roofing contractors," said Beattie. "Obviously we are in a competitive market, and we want to set the bar and set the standard that other companies coming in will want to follow. In our different states, when we are pushing recycling in our in-home sales presentations and our advertising, other contractors will want to follow suit, and it will just catch on like wildfire."

In the end, the future of recycling could hinge on pending federal regulations, noted Olen. "It's a petroleum product that we are throwing back in the ground," he said. "For years we were throwing asbestos tiles back into the landfills. That finally stopped. It's only a matter of time — and we can't get caught short. There is an enormous amount of money that will be involved."

"If the federal government stepped in and called this hazardous waste, you're going to see everyone jump into this," Olen continued. "If that happens, we've all got our answers. In another five to seven years, this might not be a nonexistent conversation. And hopefully it will go down to \$45 a ton to recycle." **RC**

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