

Business

# The KTI example



Gabor Degre | BDN

An excavator loads processed demolition debris into a semi-truck at the KTI Bio-Fuels Inc. facility in Lewiston to be hauled to the Juniper Ridge landfill in Old Town.

By nmcrea, Special to the BDN  
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LEWISTON, Maine — Interpreting the definition of in-state versus out-of-state

recyclable materials and sends the rest to Juniper Ridge Landfill in Old Town, which is operated by Casella.

Heavy equipment operators start the sorting process by picking through and sorting the larger debris. Then a line of workers monitors a conveyor belt as waste flows by, picking out recyclables such as metal and wood.

KTI turns the wood into chips, which are sent to facilities such as Boralex in Ashland, Eco-Maine in Portland, Old Town Fuel and Fiber and Sappi Fine Paper in Westbrook, which use them in a biofuel mixture for their boilers.

State Rep. Bob Duchesne of Hudson, the lead Democrat on the Legislature's Environment and Natural Resources Committee, has criticized the Casella-owned processing facility for what he sees as a low output of boiler fodder and high percentage of waste going into Juniper Ridge.

According to KTI's annual report for 2010, the company took in about 200,000 tons of construction and demolition debris. About 8 percent came from Maine, while 27 percent came from Massachusetts and the majority of the remainder

“wood fines,” which are wood chips that, under state regulations, are too small to be used in biofuel boilers.

Since this material can't be sold to KTI's customers, it is sent to Juniper Ridge, which uses the too-small-to-use chips to cover the landfilled trash and provide a protective barrier to prevent the jagged, rough garbage from punching holes in the tarpaulins used to cover the landfill.

Casella calls this use of wood fines recycling. Others, such as Duchesne, call it landfilling.

In KTI's view, it recycled 53 percent of what it processed in 2010. In Duchesne's view, the facility's recycling rate was closer to 9 percent.

Meagher, KTI and state statute disagree with Duchesne because if they weren't using these biofuel-unworthy fines for landfill cover, they'd have to use clean, virgin dirt. For that reason, the state counts the use of fines as recycling.

Duchesne called the use of fines as cover “excessive” and argued that KTI doesn't

“Figures [from 2010] show that the apparent role of KTI Bio Fuels is not to produce biofuels,” Duchesne wrote in an October letter to DEP Commissioner Patricia Aho. “It is to convert out-of-state waste to in-state waste for purposes of disposal at Juniper Ridge.”

## Push to improve

In November and December of 2011, KTI installed a new conveyor belt, hired more sorters and upgraded other parts of the facility to improve the sorting process.

Numbers for those months show a promising improvement.

Recycling rates climbed from an average of 53 percent in 2010 to 73 percent and 78 percent, respectively, in the last two months of 2011. That’s mostly because the new process and hired hands allowed the facility to spend more man-hours picking through bulky waste for recyclables and wood.

“I do applaud the investment they made there,” Duchesne said, noting that he still doesn’t like the fact that the facility uses such a high percentage of out-of-state waste.

But times and trash have changed since KTI started doing business in 1985.

“The economy was thriving years back,” said Dan Emerson, facility manager at KTI, during a tour of the grounds in November. “We didn’t have to go out and look for all kinds of different material to recover wood. It was very simple; there were a lot of wood jobs coming in.”

With construction and demolition projects in Maine dwindling in recent years because of a struggling economy, KTI has had to look across borders to bring in enough wood to supply its customers with biofuel.

More and more of those demolition materials are coming from brick-and-mortar buildings, such as factories in Massachusetts, where clean wood is more difficult to come by.

Upgrades and retrofits have helped KTI draw better numbers from this construction and demolition debris in recent months, but the company still is searching for ways to improve.

“We haven’t been sitting back and watching,” Emerson said. “We’ve been trying to come up with solutions and ways to recover more.”

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