

UNIVERSAL WASTE SYSTEMS CONTROLS COSTS WITH MACK

The move to improve air quality in California cities is raising costs among refuse haulers. One company is managing that situation with help from Mack Trucks.

“The challenges in California now are the air quality standards,” said Matt Blackburn, general manager of Universal Waste Systems in Santa Fe Springs, a suburb of Los Angeles. “We’re required with our contracts to have natural gas trucks. A lot of the cities are pushing toward compressed natural gas (CNG). Transitioning to the CNG trucks is a large expense. We’re putting in new infrastructure to fuel the trucks. We need to have enough capacity on the trucks so they can get through their daily routes. On top of that we’re taking trucks that are not fully amortized and transitioning them to run on CNG.”

Those requirements are costly to a growing firm like UWS. Blackburn’s father Mark Blackburn started the business in 1986 with one job and a single truck. Today the company has a 155-truck fleet with 150 employees and three operating facilities. UWS provides solid waste, recycling and green waste service to more than 15,000 single-family homes. (Green waste includes lawn trimmings and food items.) Under a contract with the City of Los Angeles the company offers multi-family recycling to the entire San Fernando Valley, collecting from more than 60,000 units each week. The company also transfers more than 65,000 tons of solid and green waste to local landfills each year.

Faced with a daunting capital budget, Matt Blackburn turned to Mack and its dealer, TEC of Southern California. UWS purchased 14 Mack® TerraPro™ models for collection work and five Pinnacle™ tractors for transfer operations. The TerraPro models run on CNG. The Pinnacle models average 50,000 – 75,000 miles a year between the company’s transfer station and landfills.

One of the keys to managing costs is Mack’s expertise in the refuse-hauling business. “Mack has come up with a lot of good programs and helped us get grant money to pay for the trucks,” he said.

The new models are also more efficient. “Our fuel mileage is great. We’re estimating fuel consumption of between 6 mpg and 8 mpg on the highway, and that’s in a lot of congestion. We’re saving about 2 – 3 mpg.”

In addition to buying new equipment, the company controls costs by building its own bodies and containers, supplying its own labor whenever possible. But savings isn’t the only reason UWS chose Mack.

“We’re happy with the overall quality of the trucks,” he said. “The drivers like the turning radius. They’re very happy with the comfort of the truck, and the visibility. We’re getting more trucks on the road a lot faster than we anticipated. Mack has helped our company be more successful.”

