

GARBAGE INTO GOLD TRASH FROM AIRPORT, JETLINERS IS SORTED, AND RECYCLABLES ATE SOLD FOR PROFIT

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Every morning, Don Duerr and his son, Andy, arrive at work to find a mess waiting for them: Newspapers from all over the world, cardboard boxes that once held lunches, plastic, paper, bottles.

All of it comes from the 55 airlines and concessionaires at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

What others see as a trash heap, the Duerrs see as a treasure trove _ in the recycling sense. Their company, Airport Recycling Specialists, sifts recyclables from airline garbage and sells it for profit.

Last year, the company sifted 1,035 tons of recyclable materials.

"We get basically what comes from the airline cabins," said company President Don Duerr. "We're the only full-scale recycling program of any airport in the world."

Each day, the airlines and other companies that use the terminals cart their garbage in plastic bags to the recycling compound on the northeast corner of the airport. Then they shove the bags through a chute in front of the 3,600-square-foot building.

About 400 airliners land each day at Broward County's international airport. One plane usually generates about five or six garbage bags, although widebody jets produce more, said Duerr, who declined for business reasons to say what he charges.

Inside, five workers man a conveyor belt eight hours a day, seven days a week. Wearing hard hats and heavy gloves, they pick off recyclables and toss them in various bins. The materials are then shipped to various plants around the Southeast to be melted or boiled down and recycled.

In 1996, that included 418 tons of newspaper, 212 tons of cardboard, 167 tons of office paper and magazines, 100 tons of pallets and 57 tons of aluminum cans - or 2.7 million cans.

That's not to mention glass bottles, plastic bottles, steel containers and the airline goods that got accidentally tossed out _ plastic silverware, blankets, linens and headsets.

As the number of airport flights and passengers continues to grow, the company expects business to boom.

Andy Duerr, the company's vice president, said the recycled items would otherwise take up landfill space or be burned in the county incinerator.

"There's a major environmental savings because we're saving landfill space," he said.

What the company doesn't recycle gets dumped in its trash compactor.

"If it gets by me, it's gone," said Mike Suarez, of Fort Lauderdale, one of the workers.

Suarez said the most unusual item he has found on the conveyor belt is money; he once found \$100 in loose cash. Another worker found \$300. That's loot the workers get to keep, Duerr said.

On the other hand, if a worker finds a wallet, he turns it in. More than 50 wallets and purses were found last year and returned to their owners.

Airport Recycling will also do special orders.

For instance, some airlines wanted to dispose of two Douglas DC-6 and two Convair 240 airliners - both old-fashioned, but big, propeller planes. The company chopped them up with bulldozers and sold them for scrap metal.

In business since 1989, Airport Recycling Specialists is a small, family run firm. But it has had a large environmental impact on Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International, the only airport it serves.

The airport no longer places unsightly dumpsters around the terminals. And large sanitation trucks, which pose a security and safety concern around airplanes, no longer drive on the ramps.

Don Duerr, who worked for Eastern Airlines for 21 years, founded the company after working for the Airline Managers Association and studying airport waste disposal problems.

Palm Beach International Airport also is recycle-conscious and contracts with a company to collect and haul away recyclables.

Miami International Airport has about 25 recycle bins around the terminal, allowing passengers to deposit aluminum cans, cardboard and newspaper. Except for aluminum cans, all other waste from airliners is incinerated at a complex right on the field.

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