

Recycling Facilities Evolve With Advancements in Scale House Offerings



The following story examines the increased operational efficiency achieved through the use of scale houses and equipment control cabins in the recycling industry. In particular, it examines the experience of Hennepin County Environmental Services, Minneapolis, Minnesota, as well as several other recycling facilities throughout the country.

With today's fluctuating metal prices and increased labor, insurance, fuel, and equipment operating costs, the investments made when structuring and maintaining a recycling facility must be thoroughly calculated.

As in any industry, a vital aspect for recycling companies to consider during a tough economy is how to best manage operating costs. With hundreds of vehicles frequenting recycling facilities each day, the need for up-to-date technology and operational efficiencies are key in maximizing business potential in for-profit environments and skillfully utilizing taxpayer dollars in government-managed organizations. Necessary security measures for employees, customers, cash and physical property also become a major priority.

Recycling facility operators are reporting an increased trend in the use of scale houses and control cabins to assist with operations at the front line. Amy Roering, of Hennepin County Environmental Services, commented on security and customer service benefits, "We found that our operations function much better with the presence of the new scale house from California-based B.I.G. Enterprises."

Not only are facilities utilizing more scale houses, they are also adding more scales to increase inbound and outbound lanes, sometimes even

creating a separate 'express line' for specific categories of customers. In addition to the increased security that scale houses provide, new technology software and security camera mounts tied into the structures help decrease customer discrepancies. By taking a camera snapshot of each vehicle entering the facility, operators are able to detail the weight, size and appearance of each load, cutting down on illegal materials entering the site and being dumped.

The primary issues faced by facilities without a scale house are security and equipment maintenance problems. The security of company assets in an unconfined space as well as the threat from dust and weather can create an environment that is detrimental to necessary electronics such as computers and communications' systems.

Some facilities use a job box, which provides little shelter during hot, cold or rainy weather. Those that don't use any structure generally have a large open lot that vehicles enter. One of the problems drivers encounter is that they are not immediately directed where to go, having no discernable landmark indicating a place to stop and unload.

Uncontrolled environments that once plagued the operational efficiency at many facilities can now be eliminated with the purchase of a prefabricated scale house. Unlike manufacturing a structure on-site, prefabricated options avoid retaining an architectural firm, going through a lengthy permit process, finding a competent builder, and then waiting for a protracted construction process to play itself out.

In the case of Hennepin County, the primary functions found to be the most helpful was the climate control offered by the HVAC, traffic control, and safety for vendors, suppliers, visitors, drivers and attendants. In addition, workers found the B.I.G. scale house contributed greatly to a clean working envi-



Hennepin County, MN scale house

ronment as well as a decrease in noise pollution, which was a significant help in answering phone calls.

"It provides the same things a building would—security, safety from the elements, and it's clean. Our employees keep saying that it's so clean. They are also more productive with a climate controlled scale house, especially with our harsh weather," said Roering.

After researching prefabricated structures offering custom designs, Hennepin County chose to go with B.I.G. Enterprises due to their product life expectancy and ability to meet the tough design requirements.

"Because of their construction quality, we expect these B.I.G. scale houses to be here for the life of our facility... a few decades. We're really happy—the B.I.G. scale houses arrived almost fully functional. We love them!" continued Roering.

One of the major contributing factors to this increased lifespan is the paint on the scale houses. The new B.I.G. paint system provides a catalyzed two-component polyurethane topcoat paint that serves as a protective feature by resisting chemical, impact, fade, abrasion and UV exposure. Recently tested by an independent 3rd party for rust and corrosion under extreme simulated weather conditions, the paint system showed no signs of rusting, no undercut creeping and no corrosion at the scribe cut in the steel after 3,500 hours of punishing laboratory tests. No other manufacturer of scale houses offers this paint system.

Another feature critical to operational efficiency for Hennepin County was the custom window design. "We really like the B.I.G. windows because the employees have a 360-degree view from our scale house, which helps with traffic control," added Roering. The scale houses also allow the employee to have some privacy when dealing with customers at the entrance. This lets them take notes in private and make a phone call if they feel questionable material is present and they don't want the customer to hear.



Southern California prefabricated scale house

One facility owner commented on the functionality of the doors. "These doors are offset from one another. So as the customers pull up, we can swing open the door and easily look inside the truck without having to go completely outside. As they pull in, we can observe if they have any material that we don't buy and then write it down on the ticket that we give them. When they leave, we open the outbound door to make sure they still have the unwanted materials, and didn't just dump it. These offset doors speed the process immeasurably."

With plenty of cabinet and counter space available, scale house and cabin control operators find the area convenient and easy to use. Each B.I.G. scale house comes complete with electrical - including provisions for data, communication and security camera systems, stainless steel shelves, and a high output commercial HVAC.

"Now we have everything centered where we can greet our customers without having to leave the counter area where the computer displays the weight," says a recycling manager. "This project was done the correct way, from top to bottom. This scale house works so well, that we had B.I.G. construct a similar booth for one of our East Coast locations. It was just shipped back there."

"We can handle a few more trucks now because they aren't kept waiting as long," sums up one of the control cabin operators from the inbound side. "I'd say we save as much as 35% more time."

The logo for B.I.G. Enterprises, Inc. features the letters "BIG" in a large, stylized, blue and white font. Above the letters, the tagline "WE BUILD YOUR IMAGE" is written in a curved path. Below the letters, "ENTERPRISES, INC." is written in a smaller font. To the right of the logo, the following contact information is provided: "B.I.G. Enterprises, Inc.™", "Toll Free: 800.669.1449", "Email: inquiries@bigbooth.com", and "www.bigbooth.com".

B.I.G. Enterprises, Inc. © 2010