

One man's waste is another man's power

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LAKELAND - A lot of people talk trash, but Polk County can do it with authority. Polk may be leading the nation with its new bioreactor operation.

Its bioreactor is expected to save taxpayers millions of dollars a year, and cut decomposition time by two-thirds.

"Traditionally, it would take 35 to 30 years for the waste to decompose. We're estimating that it will do it in seven to eight," said Brookes Stayer, director of Polk County Solid Waste Management.

Polk just opened a new section of its landfill that uses cutting edge bioreactor technology.

Most landfills keep their trash dry. Polk thinks it should be wet, so it pumps rainwater through it. According to experts, the payoff is that the refuse breaks down much quicker.

"It makes it much easier for bugs to move through. Therefore they can get around to all the pockets of food and stuff they want to eat to help decompose the waste," said Dennis Davis, a consultant working on the bioreactor.

Polk is not letting anything go to waste. When trash decomposes, it gives off methane -- a gas that's blamed for global warming.

Most landfills just burn it. Polk collects the gas and pipes it to a nearby plant that turns it into electricity.

The county is working closely with the University of Florida on the bioreactor project. Scientists from around the country are keeping an eye on it as well.

They hope the way Polk is now treating its trash will give them a treasure trove of ideas they can implement elsewhere.

Source: MyFox Tampa Bay, Channel 13 News. <http://www.myfoxtampabay.com>