

Smashing trash with solar power

December 21 2009, By Pat Brennan

They seem to turn heads wherever they're installed: new solar-powered trash compactors that are meant to save time and energy.

Orange County, Calif., received its first set Friday, when Waste Management of Orange County demonstrated the technology outside Mission Viejo City Hall.

The machines, about the size of a 35-gallon trash can, can smash about 85 gallons worth of garbage -- cutting down on the number of trips for trash collection as well as the amount of fuel used and the hours of employee-time spent collecting.

They're called the BigBelly [Solar Power](#) Compactor, said David Ross, director of public sector services for Waste Management of Orange County.

"Other than being sustainable and reducing carbon emissions, what is good about it is it reduces collection expenses to the customer," Ross said.

Such expenses can be reduced about five times, he said, because the compactor can handle five times the trash of comparable containers.

The [solar panels](#), atop the compactors, can store energy in a battery, he said, so the sun need not be shining for them to work. One side handles trash, the other recyclables.

The nationwide Waste Management Inc., which operates in 10 cities in Orange County, has deployed many of the [trash](#) compactors in other cities, including Los Angeles and Philadelphia, and they've resulted in savings of millions of dollars, Ross said. There's also a machine on the pier in Oceanside, Calif.

[Waste Management](#) hopes to increase the number of compactors in Orange County, he said, though they're starting with just one demonstration project.

He expects the compactors to attract attention in Orange County, as they have elsewhere.

"The first one we typically put out has high visibility and interest generated," Ross said.

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